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SIR PEREGRINE'S HEIR.

BY

JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "LADY FLAVIA."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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SIR PEREGRINE'S HEIR.



CHAPTER I.

UNDER THE BRIDGE.

THE gamekeeper coming back from his early rounds, after receiving the report of his watchers, before those night-prowling guardians of the *feræ naturæ* had slouched back, red-eyed and yawning, to their cottage homes, was not very much surprised to see "Master Darrell," with rod and creel, making his way towards the lake. "Well done, he!" muttered the man of velveteen, with a hearty appreciation of the young heir's motives for early rising which he might not have extended to those of Gray's

sunrise-loving poet. "The perch will be nicely on the feed, and I'd bet a pint of homebrewed he hooks a score of 'em before breakfast. Most of his age are sad lie-a-beds." Having said which, and touched his hat by way of signalling his respectful recognition of the heir, Mr. Snapshot's thoughts reverted to ground game, vermin, lurchers, poachers, and the prospects of the coming partridge season, and he forgot Darrell altogether. The striped shoal of perch, however, was not on that morning destined to lose some members of its finny company by Darrell's angle. Having plunged in among the reeds, and walked for some distance on the northern bank of the ornamental water, the boy next struck into a hollow way, formed, it may be, by the mattocks and spades of the indefatigable Roman soldiery, and which led up towards the height known as Welshmen's Hill. It was not a very frequented route. The deer came down by that path to drink, and in the late autumn certain cartloads of hay

were conveyed up the track to provide for their subsistence when the grass was short and scanty. There were the deep rut-marks furrowing the soft turf and, higher up, some faint traces of an outer and inner trench, guarding a double line of nearly effaced out-works, the square shape of which told its own tale. The Welsh host that had taken up a position on that hill, to be surprised by Sir Hugh Conyers and his trampling cavalry, had been merely following the example of the warier masters of the world. But the place had been a mere outpost, and retained small interest for the antiquary.

Darrell Conyers seemed to be free from any sentimental considerations as regarded this spot, for he scarcely gave it a glance as he passed round the inner *vallum*, taking care to keep as far as possible to the grassy ditch, and to avoid showing himself on the crest of the hill. Emerging at a point where some aged hawthorn trees grew so near together as to form a sort of sylvan redoubt, the walls of which were of living

wood, and green leaves, and snow-white blossoms, he leaned against the rugged bark of one of these ancients of the park, and flung down his fishing-rod amidst the pearly globules of dew that clustered thickly on the grass and daisies and harebells at his feet. "Let me be sure of my reckoning," he said, counting with poised forefinger the numbers as he spoke. "For three-quarters of an hour, to my knowledge, she was an absentee from the family fold. For the last ten out of the fatal forty-five minutes I can answer for her occupation. She needed that space, at the least, to rid herself of the too suggestive traces of her recent excursion. There was a clay smear beneath the bracelet on her white wrist, and stains of peat and moss and weed on the hem of her dress, such as I believe she could only have picked up beside the Kightle. At the first blush, it seems unlikely that she should have returned to the very spot whither I tracked her before. But then she is a woman, and therefore does what is unlikely

—a thing that men don't always allow for. Ten minutes to reach the brook; as much to return; fifteen to bury the thing, whatever it was (with the doubts and tremors and false starts inseparable from such a process), fill up the residue of the time. Bah! With figures one can prove anything—that one wishes to prove. I prefer the mute witness of the stains I saw: the clay, the peat, the club-moss, the water-weed: and whence could these have come, save from the brook below?"

A few steps brought him to the pool whence, trickling from among the broad leaves and white petals of water-lilies, and brimming over a dam of rough tree trunks and unhewn stone, the Kightle began its devious passage towards the sea. From its well-head to the place where its dignity as a brook was first recognized by the construction of a foot-bridge, was but a space of some hundreds of yards; yet in getting over that extent of ground the new-born Kightle contrived to exhibit in miniature nearly

every feature of those imposing rivers that figure so proudly on the map and in the page of the historian. There were tiny rapids, where the long green and tangle-weed waved snakily to and fro; cataracts down which some heedless insect might be washed to destruction; whirlpools where a few straws or husks of beech-nuts revolved in the midst of a teacupful of froth; lagoons full of fleshy aquatic plants and white blossoms, and shoals of yellow sand that a lady's hand might have covered. Then came the alternations of deep and shallow, and the rivulet ran brawling on to bear its contingent to the Wye. Darrell, his slender rod resting lightly upon his shoulder, walked slowly along the bank. The fishing gear which he carried with him would, as he well knew, at once explain and excuse his presence in this lonely spot at so unusual an hour, should any unsuspected eye be upon him. "They like a reason for what they see, our good friends in smock-frocks and leathern gaiters: or, for that

matter, in broad cloth and clean linen"—such was his commentary on human nature, as he went—"and here is one ready for them. There are mountain trout, black little fellows of some four ounces weight, but lively enough, in every rocky pool of these hill-streams, and they are in sound condition, and fit to tempt a boy-angler."

Presently there loomed before him the blackened timbers of the old foot-bridge, with the hazels clustering on the bank, the slender leaves of the willow that overhung the water, the bramble, the wild-rose, and the blackthorn, that interlaced their branches on the verge of the stream. And Darrell slackened his pace, scanning every square inch of the turf as he advanced, taking notice of the slightest signs, such as the bending of a bough, the ruffling of a russet heap of last year's yellowed leaves, which might give tokens of having been disturbed by some passing tread. The dew was yet heavy on the grass, and it bore the imprint of feet here and there, but they were those

of the wild creatures that shun the face of man. That small, cloven hoof-mark must be the stot of a deer. Those narrow, irregular furrows, with a long space between them, told that a leaping hare had crossed the lawns. Yonder track was probably that of the field-mouse or the brown water-vole. What heavy thing had brushed through the clump of nettles and rank grass, leaving the distinct mark of broad feet armed with powerful claws? Perhaps the badger, harmless but persecuted hermit of the hill, or the fierce polecat, stealing back from his raid among the rabbits of the warren, or some otter that waited for night to make havoc among the finny tenants of the lake. But there was no trace of a woman's foot-step.

Here, at last, was the path, a mere thread of dark earth, encroached upon by the herbage in one place, in another widening into a bare stony patch, and preserving here and there the traces of human passage; here a small round ring

stamped by the iron patten of some village child; there the dint made by the hob-nailed boot of Giles or Roger, trudging homeward after his day of toil; and then the impression of a large, ill-made shoe, thick-soled and low-heeled, which testified that some rustic matron had taken the liberty, on her way to the "shop" of Gridley Green, of making a short cut across Sir Peregrine's park. Once arrived at this point, the boy's half-careless expression became grave and earnest, while he examined every hand's breadth of the path with the patient scrutiny which some student of black-letter devotes to the crabbed French and monkish Latin of a fourteenth-century charter. For some time his search was unrewarded, but at length he detected in three or four places the dint of a high heel utterly different from those around it, and the much fainter tracery of a delicately shod foot. At one particular spot, where the path formed a sort of elbow, these marks ceased. Darrell's keen eye,

however, espied a spot where the crushed grass had but partially raised itself since some weight had flattened down its blades, and where a daisy, less tenacious, had snapped beneath a sudden tread. Beyond this place a chain of footprints, easily recognizable, remained indented in the dewy turf, and made the task of the pursuer easy indeed.

Darrell's eyes brightened, and his nostrils dilated like those of a questing hound, as he slowly followed on the track, easy enough now to pursue. The instinct of the chase, which man alone turns against his species, was fairly roused in him now, and he held to the trail with the relentless patience, and with much of the skill, of a savage on the war-path. That Adeline had left the beaten road for no other reason than mere eagerness to reach the foot-bridge, was clear enough to him. She had thus saved a few yards. Close to the wooden bridge there was a space free from turf, and this tract of soft earth the

boy vainly inspected in the hope of discovering further traces. The dew-drops clung to the ragged edges of a little drift of dead leaves, the red of the elm, the yellow of the beech, the brown of the oak, that spanned the bald patch of ground diagonally, and these had not been disturbed since nature had decked them with her liquid limpid gems. "She has not crossed the bridge; that much is certain," said the boy, as he came to a halt, and his quick eyes ranged from right to left. He was standing on a miniature headland, where the stones cropped in broken layers from the peaty soil, and where no tread was likely to leave its mark. This narrow slip of shattered rock curved round in crescent shape to the right, and lost itself, finally, among the marsh-mallows and stunted rushes, the osier-bed and belt of briars, that bordered on the bank of the stream. The stony ground was too hard to preserve a trace, nor did the coarse and straggling vegetation beyond retain the

mark of footsteps as the dewy grass had done.

Suddenly, with a glad cry, the seeker started forward, and in two long bounds he gained the object which had attracted his notice. It was but a strip, not much broader than a finger, of some woollen material, a portion, apparently, of the border of a dark soft shawl, clinging to a low bush, the thorns of which had transfixed it; but Darrell triumphantly thrust it, after a brief survey, into his pocket.

"Proof number one," he said coolly; "I score the first point in the game, whoever sweeps the board at the finish. There should be scanty difficulty now in steering a right course." And indeed it was obvious by the flattened herbage and the bent boughs that Adeline had pressed on towards the stream, avoiding the bridge, and had descended the steep bank, with some trouble, as was evident by the marks which the soft mould retained. "A slippery place for a lady's passage, and at

twilight, too!" was Darrell's comment, as, grasping a willow bough, he swung himself down without touching the bank with his feet. Standing on the pebbles at the edge of the brook, the boy could see, here and there, impressed in the soft pure sand that streaked the bed of the stream, the print of a dainty little feminine foot, beyond question that of her whose steps he was dogging. Some of these marks pointed down, and some up, the brook, as if indicative of some indecision on the part of her to whom they belonged.

Darrell laughed again softly, as he counted the impressions which the sand preserved.

"Odd, if she has chosen yonder hollow bank—my bank—the hiding-place whence I beheld her interview with the foreigner—for the grave wherein to bury what she wishes to lie covered up for ever from the eyes of men. Yet it is a tempting nook for such a purpose. A stray boy bird-nesting, or a fisher in search of bait,

might come here, but no one else. How strange that anybody should take such trouble, when the striking of a match was enough to make all secure ! ”

As he spoke, he approached the bank, the shingle on which he trod rattling beneath his feet, and being obviously too hard to keep the trace of a footstep. Then he stooped his head, so as to get a good view beneath the overhanging pent-house of brambles, and examined the bank, foot by foot, inch by inch, as if it had been some rock-carving of Elephanta or Persepolis. One steep bank of hard but decaying sandstone is excessively like another. As usual there were round holes leading to the nest of the hornet, the mason wasp, or the humble-bee, whence rushed forth, buzzing and prepared to scare away the intruder, the wrathful paterfamilias, armed in his sting. There were crevices for the beetle, holes for the snake, the water-rat, and the hedgehog. One large aperture, gaping and cavernous, told how a fox had been dug

out of his earth, years ago, to "blood" the greedy pack of baying hounds that crowded round, hungering for vulpine flesh.

Darrell approached the place, and scanned it narrowly. The lowering mouth of the recess was but a few inches above the level of the stream, and, close beside it, a trickling thread of water, and the moistened and discoloured surface of the bank, told of the presence of a land spring. "Damp quarters these, for Master Reynard," he said musingly; "unless, as seems likeliest, the place was dry in his time of tenancy. The red rascal must have deteriorated sadly since Æsop's days, if he endured so disagreeable a dwelling, when wholesomer lodgings were so near. That boulder, too, which must weigh a hundred pounds at the least, has sunk down since then, barring the entrance to—ha! what is this?" And without the loss of a moment he began to minutely examine the mouth of the abandoned fox-earth.

Nothing, at first sight, could present a more natural appearance than did this ruinous abode of the dead robber of hen-roosts. The weighty stone that blocked the lower part of it was partially concealed by grass and moss, by the wild geranium, and the maiden-hair fern. But Darrell had observed that the moss, instead of being green and thriving, was grey and withered, while the tufts of grass, newly plucked, and hastily set in their present position, made but an artificial screen, the removal of which gave to view a gaping cavity beneath the stone, into which he could easily thrust his arm. "Awkward, should a viper or a weasel set his teeth in my hand, by way of protest against this trespass," muttered the boy—"but stay! This, I think, must be the treasure, after all." And as he spoke, his fingers, groping in the moist earth, closed upon something metallic and heavy—a large brass key, so it proved, when extricated from its hiding-place in the mould.

What Darrell had found was not by any means that which he had expected to find, and for a moment or two he stared blankly, and half incredulously, at the key which he held in his hand. Then his bright smile, banished for awhile, again lit up his more than handsome face.

“Not won as yet, the game!” he said, “but very nearly so. This cumbrous bit of metal is my guarantee, at any rate, that the object I wish to find is still in existence. Where have I seen such a key, or something like it? No matter, I shall not be slow to find the door which must respond to this ‘Open Sesame’ in solid brass. And now,”—and as he spoke he glanced at his watch (a present from Sir Peregrine)—“I had better hurry homewards. Stay! I may as well replace this sorry imitation of nature’s workmanship where I found it. So grass, and moss, and flower shall be made again to do their duty in masking this dwarfish grotto; and in case my clever kinswoman comes back, she will have faith

in the safety of her darling mystery. One shower of rain and the lapse of a week would work wonders here."

The boy's deft fingers had soon concealed every sign of the inroad which had been made upon Adeline's chosen hiding-place. Then he bent over the stream, and dipping his hands in the purling water, dried them on a bunch of coarse couch grass, that flourished on the verge of the brook. Two minutes more, and he was on his homeward way, gaining the mansion before the other members of the family were astir. That would have been a keen physiognomist who could have told by the expression of Darrell's face, as he joined the usual group at breakfast, that anything abnormal had occurred. On that day, the young heir of Crag Towers gave tokens of an archæological turn of mind, winning golden opinions from the mature housekeeper, a personage who was severely exercised in spirit by Sir Peregrine's steadfast refusal to permit the Castle to be

treated as what is called a "show-house" for the British public.

This is a subject on which upper servants and their masters are apt to take a different view; although, to do Mrs. Winter justice, that admirable female seneschal was less influenced by an itching palm for fees than by feudal loyalty and a wish to glorify the possessions of the ancient family on whose lands she had been born. It was a gratification to her, debarred as she was from the privilege of playing cicerone to miscellaneous sight-seers, to find in the future lord of the mansion a patient and attentive listener, willing to be conducted from china closet to lumber-room, from wardrobe to plate-chest, and to endure the worthy dame's prolix descriptions of a hundred minor antiquities for which the majority of boys entertain the same rooted abhorrence that they feel towards their lessons.

Darrell did not manifest the slightest sign of weariness as he surveyed these relics of the past—the gorgeous christening-mantle

worn by apocryphal royalty at some baptismal font of the middle ages; the parcel-gilt goblet in which Queen Bess of glorious memory had pledged a health to her loving liege and lavish host Sir Tristram Conyers, the tilting-helmet and gold spurs of the said Sir Tristram; an autograph letter, signed Charles R., strongly urging Sir Godfrey, grandson of Elizabeth's entertainer, to raise a troop and march to join the royalists at Nottingham; and many similar curiosities, down to the trunk-hose and farthingales of bygone generations, a grove of which hung in a cupboard of Pantagruelic dimensions. There were pictures also, too black in many cases to permit of the deciphering of more than the vaguest outlines of the human features or shape, but in the enormous pecuniary value and high artistic merit of which the faithful housekeeper was a devout believer, only deploring that Sir Peregrine had denied them space in the inhabited portion of the house, if not in the picture gallery itself!

Picture gallery! A gleam of light flashed in Darrell's eyes as he heard the words. His memory had not, then, played him false, and he *had* seen the key, which he now bore about with him, before. It is, however, one thing to summon up a demon, and another to exorcise him; and, although honest Mrs. Winter had nothing very diabolical in her aspect or disposition, so it proved on this occasion. It was late before the excellent housekeeper had concluded her bead-roll of objects that deserved to be more generally known, and later still, when Darrell was able to repair unnoticed to the picture gallery.

Yes, he was right in his conjecture. The unused oaken cabinet was the true goal of his researches. There, at the end of a long avenue, formed by the portraits of his and her ancestors, had been bestowed out of sight the thing which his kindred enemy wished to see no more, yet scrupled to destroy. The key turned slowly, unwillingly as it seemed, in the cumbrous and corroded

lock, and the door opened creakingly. A moment more, and the old cabinet, closed once more, looked a safe if unlikely repository for whatever might be confined to its keeping. Yet the oyster had been rifled of its pearl, for Darrell was the possessor of the clasped volume, purple bound, which Adeline Conyers had deemed worth purchasing at so high a price. Once in his own rooms in the west wing, out of reach for the time of prying eyes, he undid the gilded clasp, not hastily, but with a slow, deliberate enjoyment of the work in which he was engaged. He opened the book, and glanced, at first half superciliously, over its closely written pages of manuscript.

“Was this fair value for the diamonds?” he murmured, fluttering over leaf after leaf. “Bad poetry; pompous prose; namby-pamby quotations; a school-girl’s raptures, one would say, seasoned with scores and dashes, at all she hears, or sees, or reads. The greedy old French hag made a good bargain, it seems to me, if all the rest of

the volume resemble this. Stay—this looks like metal more attractive. Let me see if I can reach the kernel of this pretty nut!" And his face was grave enough as he read on heedfully and with an obviously increasing interest.

Presently the boy rose, closing the volume, reclasping it, and consigning it to a drawer, which he locked. "This," he said smiling as he withdrew the key, "will prevent any inquisitive housemaid from becoming a sharer in my knowledge of the secret. So, so, fair lady, I know, with the help of a little guess-work to fill up gaps, the real history of your life, do I? A pretty mine I could spring beneath her feet, if I chose to risk a scene and a scandal! Don't try me too far, my proud kinswoman, that is all, lest you find that in Darrell the hated, child as you think him, you have met with your match, and something more!"

CHAPTER II.

PREPARING FOR THE FÊTE.

IN due postal course there arrived a letter, signed Mark Meanwell, in which the tutor notified Sir Peregrine of his grateful acceptance of the vacant living. The letter, though a critic might have regarded it as somewhat formal and perfunctory, as the expression of the writer's thanks, satisfied Sir Peregrine, and a brisk triangular correspondence forthwith began between patron, bishop, and vicar elect, which ended in a day being appointed for Mr. Meanwell's official interview with my lord and my lord's chaplain, and for his being inducted into his cure of souls. The latter ceremony would take place in accordance with the ancient customs of ringing in and reading in, but

there appeared to be no practical obstacle to the Reverend Mark's being at once put into possession of the more temporal part of his ecclesiastical freehold. The widow of the late incumbent, now vegetating with her three unmarried daughters at Cadbury, some six miles off, was glad to allow the incoming tenant of the parsonage to take the old furniture "off her hands," to use the words of the friendly Cadbury auctioneer who made the necessary valuation, while Mr. Meanwell was not sorry to be spared the cost and pains of garnishing his bachelor abode.

There was some natural excitement in Gridley Green, for the arrival of a new and unmarried clergyman is, in the uneventful lives of a rustic congregation, a circumstance of some importance. Marriageable damsels and perspicuous mothers are to be found even in such quiet parishes as that over the spiritual ministrations of which Darrell's late tutor was to preside; and it was wonderful with what rapidity

reports concerning the tastes, age, and personal appearance of Mark Meanwell circulated throughout the bounds of his cure. That he would be found a worthy man, a little shy, a little odd, but with an excellent heart, was the general verdict. Of course he would marry. It would be an insult to the proprieties and to the blooming spinsterhood for miles around, should not the old parsonage be once more made merry by the patter of children's feet upon its floors, and the vicar's pew be occupied by the vicar's helpmate. But there was another especial subject of interest connected with the Reverend Mark. Would he and, what mattered more, his future wife be admitted to the intimacy of the great family at the Towers? Heads were gravely shaken, and very various predictions volunteered, on that point. Opinions clashed, and there were even Meanwellites and anti-Meanwellites in the country side. The disgrace and exile of Sir Peregrine's only son Edmund, whose only offence was

in his marriage with the tutor's sister, did not promise much for the baronet's cordial acceptance of such a tie by affinity, as linked the humble north-countryman to the descendant of the old Conyers stock. But then Sir Peregrine had gone so far as to present to this living, at his own park gates, the brother-in-law of his banished son, and thus recognized the connection which, since Darrell's residence at Crag Towers, was, perhaps, more indulgently viewed.

Poor Mr. Meanwell's ears would have tingled, could they have been endowed with the power of overhearing all the debates and speculations entered into by people of whose very names he was ignorant, as to the particular *status* which he would hold when established at Gridley Green. Should "the county" take him at once, as a neophyte, into its charmed circle, and make him free of its heavy dinners, solemn croquet, and other decorous festivities? In that case, he might very probably find, at

Lostwick Grange say, or Barton Court, or Hundham Hall, or at the archdeacon's at Beech End, a partner for his joys and sorrows. There were damsels at these and other mansions belonging to the second flight of county Brahminism, who, in the dearth of marrying squires, might deign to bear rule over Gridley Vicarage, that is if Sir Peregrine and his daughters "countenanced" the new parson, and admitted his claims to their connection. Otherwise he would be left to the friendship of the farmers, of Mr. Brumby the maltster, of the Cadbury brewer and bank-manager, and of others outside the territorial pale. All depended on the behaviour of the family at Crag Towers.

In the interim, with perhaps the exception of Darrell, who never spoke of his old teacher save with liking and affection, the family at Crag Towers devoted very few words or thoughts to Mr. Meanwell. For now Craven Conyers had spoken, more than once, of the necessity for his

soon bringing his visit to a close. "My lady-mother," he said laughingly, "writes twice a week to upbraid me for spending so little of my time ashore with her; and since I have the bad taste to detest Paris, she insists that I should accompany her on her annual migration to the seaside—Trouville or Biarritz, I don't know which—whither fashionable Lutetia, according to a French illustrated paper, which came by way of rider to the last letter, is soon to transport the latest follies and fineries of the Bois and the Boulevards. I must go though, on pain of being sadly unfilial; and then, too, Seymour, at the Admiralty, drops me a hint to press my claims for a ship, while the London season is still at high pressure, and 'My Lords' yet in town. He says that it would be a mercy to the headquarters' staff, if naval appointments, like tide-waiterships and desks at Somerset House, were made the rewards of those officers who won most marks in a competitive examination: and really the idea is

no bad one. As it is, the First Lord makes a dozen political enemies every time he has a gunboat or a guardship to be scrambled for by poor seafaring idlers like myself, all wild to sniff blue water and draw full pay as soon as may be."

But the young commander's plans for an early departure were overruled, since a garden party, the first idea of which had originated with Adeline, was contemplated; and it was unanimously agreed that Craven must defer his journey until after this entertainment. Now a garden party may mean anything, from weak tea and strawberries in a snail-haunted arbour, to a Dilkooshah of delight that might almost pass for a short experience of the Moham-medan Paradise—the roast pigs and the rivers of red wine being replaced by dainties and drinks more suitable to the fastidious palates of nineteenth-century Christians. There are cunning men, Cooks, in point of fact, of the open-air festivities, ready to organize bowers of bliss at short notice,

and to provide lamps and brass bands, electric lights and iced champagne, fireworks, jugglers, supper, and operatic singers, in exact proportion to the amount of the cheque that may be drawn. There are other talented persons, artists rather than contractors, who disdain to be imprisoned within the cramped bonds of a fixed charge, and who ask nothing but *carte blanche* and reasonable time to perform prodigies. One of these festal *condottieri*, at the suggestion of Miss Conyers, had been entrusted with the office, to him a labour of love, of superintending the garden party at Crag Towers, and was even then expected at the Castle. It was a rule with Pictorial Brown, whose popular appellation had probably been bestowed on him to distinguish him from his landscape-gardening predecessor and namesake, the Capability Brown of long ago, personally to study every feature of the spot for the temporary embellishment of which his talents were to be called into requisition. He would no

more consent to be responsible for any *impromptu* display than a prudent general would give battle without reconnoitering the ground on which the action must be fought.

It was agreed, then, that Craven Conyers was to remain until after the fête had taken place. The day was fixed, the invitations sent forth, and for some square leagues of that thinly peopled district the engrossing topic of conversation was the coming party at Sir Peregrine's. The flutterings of hope, the heartburnings, the intrigues, as regarded the privilege of being present on that auspicious evening, would in themselves have given abundant employment to the pen of a social chronicler. There always are those who consider a card for some festivity at a house like the Towers as equivalent to a presentation at court, and who are capable of cajolery, importunity, and barefaced beggary itself, sooner than be left in the outer desolation of the unasked. Whoever was thought to have

some influence with the dispensers of invitations found himself, or more often herself, beset by very dear friends, whose highest earthly wish was to find some one willing to take under her matronly wing "the girls"—dear Alice, darling Clementine, poor Florry—whose little hearts were wholly set on being at the Conyers' entertainment.

The most glowing accounts of the grand doings to come circulated around the country like a snowball gathering fresh volume as it rolls along, for Pictorial Brown and his daring designs were not unknown to local fame. The illustrated newspapers had reproduced some of the effects that, two years since, had dazzled all the neighbouring county, when his Grace the Duke of Upandownshire had celebrated the majority of his eldest son. Two or three of the provincial magnates, at rare intervals, had called in the expensive aid of this enchanter, and never without a large meed of success. That the band of a regiment of the Guards

would discourse sweet music at Crag Towers, by kind permission of Colonel Frogbelt, was indeed only believed by a few enthusiasts. It was, however, more widely credited that the baronet had been compelled to veto some of Mr. Brown's ambitious schemes, such as the erection of a sham village in the park, where sham villagers, beribboned, bodiced, and silk-stockinged, in the first style of stage rusticity, should dance in front of their pasteboard châteaux and theatrical campanile, the lime-light shining the while on an artificial waterfall spanned by a "practicable" bridge.

"I do believe, though," said Craven Conyers, when the report reached him, "that the fellow would like to do it, and more. He takes his occupation as seriously as a field-marshal laying out the chart of a campaign."

For the great Brown had by this time arrived at the Towers, and was going about, pencil and pocket-book in hand, guided by

one of the footmen, and attended by a pale young man whom he called his secretary, and who certainly had enough to do to transfer to paper the results of the notes which his principal was incessantly taking, and whose frequent letters and telegrams to confidential agents in the metropolis gave the mounted grooms who carried them to the post-town plenty of work during the forty-eight hours of the artist's stay. Sir Peregrine, like some other haughty men, was not very prone to mere purse-proud ostentation. His own housekeeping was conducted on a large-handed scale of liberality, and was decorous and dignified as to its details ; but he seldom cared to launch out into lavish expenditure for the sake of effect. It was for Darrell's sake that he had allowed himself to be gradually drawn into the gilded gossamer nets of the clever professional man whom he had for once raised to the rank of prime minister, if not of dictator, at Crag Towers. The old baronet, though he kept his own counsel,

looked on this fête as a sort of public recognition of his young heir, and as being given expressly in honour of the future lord of the manor. He was glad, too, that the old mansion should be brightened up, so to speak, by the commencement of a new era of gaiety more congenial to Darrell's years and sunny nature than had been the somewhat sombre festivities which were all that it had known of late.

Meanwhile it really seemed as though Craven's impending departure had in some degree produced the unexpected effect of softening the proud, self-reliant nature of the elder of Sir Peregrine's daughters. Adeline had become gentler and less exacting; her usual tone of cold dignity or of biting sarcasm was growing rare with her; and she exerted herself, and not unsuccessfully, to please, instead of commanding homage as a tribute to her beauty and her courage. It was as if a queen regnant, some Semiramis or Zenobia of the old world, had come down from the steps of

golden throne, and dropped the jewelled crown and the glittering sceptre, to droop her eyes meekly, like a village maiden when she meets her lover, before those of the man who was dearer to her than all the world beside. Captain Conyers was true to his own deep-rooted love for his Cousin Adeline, but he must have been more or less of a mortal had he failed to be touched by the compliment which Adeline's manner, unconsciously as it seemed, conveyed. The young sailor was as free from coxcombry as might have been predicated from the downright manliness of his character; yet he must have been blind, he thought, had he not perceived that this fair relative of his cared for him, and that more than was good for her own peace of mind. And he was sorry for her; yet, so manifold are the warps and twists of our mental anatomy, it would not have been without a twinge of regret that he would have heard of her going to another.

It was something essentially pr

because new, in Adeline's altered behaviour: in the half-submissive airs which she now assumed, the ingenuous meekness with which she yielded where she had been used to command, and the gentle self-abnegation with which she put her younger sister forward, so to speak, herself retiring to the second place, vice Nellie promoted. Griselda herself could scarcely have shown fewer symptoms of what ladies style a "proper spirit" than did the once imperious Adeline during these the last days of Craven's stay. She had acquired a habit of deferring to the captain's opinion, which in itself was a very subtle species of flattery. Then, too, her demeanour implied a tender, humble interest in the future happiness of the sister who was preferred to her: a quiet, watchful affection, which in itself was very soothing to the self-love from which none can be wholly exempt. It was impossible that Craven should not be gracious towards a woman so beautiful, whose unfortunate fancy for himself, cherished without hope,

so it seemed, and without repining, had thus softened and saddened her. It may be doubted whether Nellie quite approved of the young commander's chivalric consideration for Adeline. No engaged, or tacitly engaged, young lady ever will, perhaps, be quite brought to cordially sanction the gentleness which the man whom she considers as her own may exhibit towards a rival who has had the good taste to show no resentment at her defeat. Pity, as girls feel rather than know, may quicken into love, and they will greatly prefer that a good wholesome indifference should take the place of all this romantic compassion.

No; Nellie was not quite happy. In the first place, Craven was going away. She should for some time to come see him no more; perhaps might even never be destined to see him again. Then, too, he had not spoken; while, should he speak, what could her answer be, save to assure him of her deathless love, while at the same time giving little or no hope. There was, she

thought, no probability that they two could marry. Her own means, it has been said, were very small. The little that Lady Conyers had left her was but regarded as mere pocket-money, and even for that purpose insufficient for one who had from childhood been taught by example to spend and to give liberally. Sir Peregrine had, of course, the disposal of a considerable income, but not an acre could he leave, were he so minded, away from Darrell, who must inherit the estates along with the baronetcy. A great landed proprietor, even though his estate be strictly entailed on a male heir, may be reasonably expected to make some handsome provision for his two marriageable daughters: but this was a boon from the asking of which Nellie shrank with a delicacy which was possibly overstrained. It was more to the purpose that her father was precisely the man to take such a proposal in bad part. He had a horror of mortgages, rent-charges, and all the other financial leeches that suck away

the life-blood of many a nominally fine property. It was part of his creed, too, that the daughters of an old family had no right to impoverish its chief for the benefit of needy husbands. A sort of Salic law, in his judgment, held good with reference to property. "It is very well and natural," he would say, "for self-made men to throw their cotton or iron heiresses into the market. For those of a different order, a sufficient dowry should be the blood they inherit and the name they bear."

Meanwhile Mr. Brown's satellites were hard at work, and the Hamadryads of the park, if such survived, must have been scared by the sounds of plane and saw and hammer, as stands were built up, "fixed pieces" prepared by cunning pyrotechnists, tent-poles driven firmly into the green turf, and masked batteries of tinted fires and surreptitious rockets got into position in carefully selected spots. Packages the most various, and thoughtful men with close-shaven faces, not seldom with odd scars

upon their pliant hands, and in one or two instances with somewhat less than the due complement of fingers, came down from London by parliamentary trains. And it was almost forgotten, or at any rate remembered by none but Darrell, that the day of Mr. Meanwell's arrival at his parsonage-house was the very one that had been fixed for the garden party.

CHAPTER III.

THE GARDEN PARTY.

THE day of the garden party came at length, and, contrary to the predictions of some croakers (naturally uninvited), it was one of unclouded splendour. Our fickle English climate, as it now and then will do, nailed its colours, metaphorically, to the mast, and came out gorgeously in all the panoply of gold and azure. There was a bright hot sun, tempered by a breeze sufficient to stir the silken streamers that hung, multi-tinted, from the summits of the tall Venetian poles, and to flutter the gay flags on tent and marquee and pavilion. It was pleasant, even on the dusty high roads and in the lanes that wound between high hedge-rows, as the many carriages—from the well-

horsed barouche to the immemorial gig and convenient four-wheeled chaise—rolled towards Crag Towers. Some alteration had been made in the original programme of the festivities, for, over and above the number of the guests proper, there were bidden on this occasion many whose caste did not permit them to rub shoulders with the exalted of the earth—visitors, so to speak, below the salt. Sir Peregrine had remembered, or he had been reminded, that he was honorary colonel of the local battalion of volunteers, and this entailed a wholesale invitation to the citizen soldiery, their wives, daughters, and sisters. Then there were the tenantry of the estate, and a large contingent of villagers, and sundry other persons, for whose behoof a perfect camp had been pitched in the park, and who were to share, though not on equal terms, in the merry-making which their great neighbour had provided.

To do simple justice to Pictorial Brown, he was only too ready to co-operate in carrying

out these extended plans at the briefest notice; nor would he have declined to be responsible for hospitalities on a yet more prodigal scale of liberality, such, for instance, as that of Warwick the King-maker, who is said to have daily fed ten thousand Englishmen out of the poor five millions of the then population. Mr. Brown was really, like his Highness the Khedive, a man of magnificent ideas, and would, with enough of blank cheques at his disposal, have gone near to ruin Belshazzar. On many points Sir Peregrine, like others of his noble and gentle employers, had been obliged to curb the zeal of his imaginative Viceroy. Thus the baronet had set his face against the roasting of whole oxen, and their public distribution, along with a cellarful of beer, to a shouting mob around a bonfire, in spite of the very respectable authorities adduced in support of this ancient practice. Nor would he permit the gathering to be made ridiculous by the anachronism of a gigantic

Maypole, a May queen crowned with flowers, and a dance around the garland-laden post by a handful of selected peasantry, mixed with, and drilled by, stage countrymen from the London boards. But there was to be dancing under canvas, and a parade and a marching past, and rifle-shooting at the improvised butts, a foot-race even; with abundance of good viands and ale and wine for the second and third categories of the invited, while all would be free to share in the pleasures which fireworks and music, at a later hour, could impart.

There was archery, too, with the inevitable croquet, to help to while away the shining hours of the aristocratic portion of the company; while two cricket clubs were to play an annual match on a well-rolled space which had been chosen for them in the park; and there were other amusements, a full catalogue of which, on the ensuing Saturday, choked up the columns of the *County Chronicle* and the *Western Monitor*. It was, taken alto-

gether, one of those entertainments which, given favourable conditions as to weather, are fairly certain to be a success; but which a drizzle may damp, and persistent wet drown fathoms deep. On this occasion the meteorological presages were of the best. Even surly Surgeon Lancetter, who had never pardoned Sir Peregrine for putting the minor practice at Crag Towers into the hands of a younger and safer doctor than this boozy veteran of the calomel jar and the cupping-glass, could not but own, as he scowled at his battered barometer, that the "fine and dry" of that impartial instrument was likely to prove a true augury.

The three categories of the invited came trooping in: the guests, as a rule, arriving, as regarded the hour of their coming, in inverse ratio to their worldly grade. Thus the honest country folks, dressed in their sprucest attire, and ready to drink their holiday, as it were, to the drègs, were earliest in the field. The Volunteers, with

band and colours, marched from the railway station, their blushing honours thick upon them in the shape of dust, with military punctuality. The cricketers rallied round their wickets, and the hired carriages from adjacent towns set down their living freight, long before the silken jackets of the marquis's postillions were seen flashing among the green glades of the park. The illustrious Brown, who had assumed a quiet air of proprietorship in the Castle and its surroundings, and who took as much credit to himself for the loveliness of the day as though he had been clerk of the weather, watched the inpouring of both great and small with a serene interest. His trained subordinates were all at their allotted posts, but he himself disdained the slightest appearance of anxiety or overcare. Cool as a consummate generalissimo at the outset of a battle, he could afford to shut up his telescope and leave to others the task of carrying out the lucid orders of their chief.

Even Mr. Brown, however, as he hovered

in the background, could not but privately admit that in all his experience he had never seen a young hostess more competent to do the honours of such a house as Crag Towers than her on whom that duty now devolved. "The Duchess," he remarked in confidence to himself, in allusion to the consort of his patron in the next county, "wasn't fit to hold a candle to her. When she got a little red and a little warm, you wouldn't have known the difference between Her Grace and a cook. But this is a bird of another feather." And indeed Pictorial Brown was not the only person who bestowed merited praise upon the stately grace with which the swan-necked Adeline received that large and miscellaneous company. It needed that marvellous combination of brilliant beauty, faultless dress, and manners at which the most censorious could scarcely cavil, to produce the murmur of admiration that followed her as she traversed the throng. She had seldom looked more

radiant than now, when, wreathed with smiles, she bade welcome to all, displaying much of that innate tact and practised memory which we are apt to class as the especial attributes of royalty. And in truth Sir Peregrine's eldest daughter bore no slight resemblance to some fair young queen, bent on winning the hearts of the people that crowd around her. Craven Conyers could not but own to himself, as he watched Adeline's progress among the many groups of guests, that he had never before seen a woman so lovely. Her pride, which, as concerning her bearing towards himself, she had of late laid aside, had returned to her now, but it was as a softened, chastened pride, that enhanced the charm of her manner and lent a magic to every word which she uttered. Most of us set the highest value on the rare condescension of the very proud; and Adeline's reputation for haughty coldness absolutely served to increase her popularity, now that her reception of those

who had responded to her father's invitation was so genial and so kind. Nellie's unobtrusive prettiness, trim as was her slender waist, and dainty as was the sweet innocence of her delicate face, passed almost unnoticed by contrast with her sister's remarkable beauty. Miss Conyers was attired, too, with that extreme art which counterfeits while it outshines simplicity of costume: yet she wore no jewels, and, save for a flower or two, was wholly without ornament, whether by day or after artificial light had begun to replace the waning brilliance of the sun.

It has often been said that nothing is easier than to bring people together, nothing more difficult than to amuse them. But this, like some other axioms, errs, as not allowing for the magic which the assembling in sufficient numbers exercises over the gregarious animal, man. Pack our species closely, and they will amuse themselves. At a coronation, a royal marriage, a peace celebration in London, it is but little

that any unit of the swarming million can have derived, in the shape of actual pleasures, from the show provided by our *edile* at the Home Office, or by the Court functionary whom we glorify as a Lord Chamberlain. A good many rockets soared aloft, bursting into nebulae of blue, red, green, or yellow fire aloft, a good many Roman candles pitched their blue flame in arches from side to side. Clubs and loyal tradesmen were gorgeous as to gas-light and transparencies. Gas, fireworks, and petroleum did their best, in a thousand devices, to turn dull night into garish day. Very, very little of these pretty gewgaws came under the individual eyesight of myriads of those under-fed, ill-clad atoms of humanity whose lot it is for long hours to be pushed and jostled, to wait, to walk through streets wedged up by solid masses of men and women; and yet few thoughtful observers, to say nothing of the intelligent foreigner, can fail to be surprised, and even touched, by the patient cheer-

fulness of a great London crowd. The multitude in England has a commendable tendency to be amused by mere contact.

At Crag Towers many preparations had been made for the general happiness. The vast hum, the stir, the indescribable electric thrill that knits into one bond of brotherhood the swarming population of a great city, were indeed perforce lacking. But then everybody knew, if not all who were there, at least the precise round on the social ladder whereon every one else was perched. The different groups, free from the traditional London indifference as to that suspicious person, one's next door neighbour, were full of keenly-felt interest as to the fortunes, the looks, the toilets, and the demeanour of one another. Then, too, there was that hearty pleasure in the day itself, in the fleeting hour, in the realization of hopes long cherished, which can hardly exist where the feverish rush and whirl of the busy world prevail. Had Hymen been present, his torch left behind in fireproof

quarters, he and he alone could have registered the amount of engagements and quasi-engagements, the offers, acceptances, and faithful or transitory troth-plights, of which the noble trees or the blossomed shrubs of the garden, or the gray old castle, were silent witnesses.

Sir Peregrine was unusually urbane, and almost talkative. He had acknowledged, with a good grace, the salute of the volunteer battalion of which he was, in a non-natural sense, commanding officer. He had even addressed a few words of good-humoured approval to the rank and file, and had been complimentary to the hard-working major and adjutant who kept the corps together. He had looked on at both cricket and croquet, and had lingered for a much longer time near the archery targets. But for this preference there was the reason that Darrell was outshining all competitors at this now almost neglected exhibition of English skill, and that the boy's arrows flew swift and sharp as those of our ballad hero, Robin Hood, to the mark.

"Why, Darrell, I did not know that you could do this. Did you learn to shoot, as you do, in India?" asked the old man, as he heard the incessant thud, thud, of the shafts striking into the butt, very few missing the mark they were aimed at. Darrell laughed as he raised his frank eyes to meet those of his grandfather.

"There are good archers, sir," he said, "among the hill tribes. Gonds and Bheels shoot well, because their dinner may depend on the knocking over of a peafowl or a spotted deer. But Sir Henry here would be a match for even my tawny teachers, outcast wretches as they were, whose very shadow would have polluted a fat Brahmin in his spotless muslins."

Sir Henry Buckram, who was at that moment engaged in bending his tough bow of brown yew, the strength of which contrasted strongly with that of the effeminate lancewood toys in the hands of the other male toxophilites, looked round with a frown. Archery was his pet hobby, and

he was *facile princeps* in the club of that bow-loving shire. As Captain Buckram, of the Princess Royal's Own, he had been as smart a martinet, before he succeeded to the title and the fat acres of Paddingsworth, as ever made himself hated by a troop of worried hussars; and he was inclined to consider the upstart superiority of this slip of a lad as a kind of practical impertinence that deserved extra drill and stoppages. He had, at first, set Darrell to shoot along with the young ladies, at the sixty yards range, until those fair archeresses had given over shooting to clap their gauntleted hands in genuine applause of the boy's performance. And now here was this presumptuous stripling, sending arrow after arrow to the centre of the target, scoring reds, and golds, and bull's eyes, as if the bowman's art had been a conjuring trick, and shooting point-blank shafts at the hundred yards range, as though his wrists had been of tempered steel. It was little short of an affront to the winner of twenty prizes to

oap his best hits with so provoking a dexterity. Darrell saw the frown, and smiled as he saw it; but when Sir Peregrine had left the ground to welcome fresh guests, it did so happen that the contest for the silver-gilt bugle was decided by a single gold, in favour of Sir Henry Buckram.

“Never make an enemy if you can help it, whether with cue, or bow, or fencing foil,” muttered the boy, as he rambled off among the lively groups. “Buckram’s good word is worth more than the empty pride of beating a booby.” And it was a fact that Sir Henry always afterwards spoke in the handsomest terms of the bright boy who had pushed even him so hard, yet had been worsted after all.

Then came the riflemen’s competition, the prizes for which, given by Sir Peregrine, were really worth the winning; and presently feasting was the order of the day, as beneath the canvas roofs of marquees more or less splendid, knives and

forks rattled merrily, and the champagne flowed as freely in one quarter as the home-brewed ale in another. The cellars of the Castle had been liberally drawn upon for the refreshment of a large and thirsty company, and there were those present who would for years to come enunciate disparaging contrasts between the dubious vintages of every-day life and the velvety smack and aromatic bouquet of the Towers' claret. But even an entertainer of Sir Peregrine's means could not have spread a banquet for so many people, and at such a distance from London, had it not been for the potent support of that very extraordinary minister who was for once in supreme authority over the Home Department. Had Mr. Brown been a Brownie instead of a bald man with bushy whiskers, the domestic machinery could not have worked with more smooth exactness than it did. His extra footmen seemed as much at home in the Conyers' livery as though they had come into the world in plush and

powder, with the falcon crest on their resplendent buttons. The black-coated sprites who glided around the long tables were, each of them, a discreet combination of the eyes of Argus and the hands of Briareus. The purveyor had surely the genii of the lamp out of employ through the decease of the Vizier Aladdin, to bring together the choicest delicacies from remote districts and far-away countries. The white-clad *chef*, presiding over roasts and ragoûts, had the tact to persuade the regular cook of the Castle, that to him and not to the culinary free-lance who did four-fifths of what was done, should be assigned the credit of feeding many hungry mouths with such appetizing skill.

The prettiest part of the fête was yet to come. The long, hot day burned itself out, and now the last flush of crimson faded in the west, and the trembling stars hung shimmering in the soft evening sky. Was that a new planet which suddenly appeared among the silvery specks so high up in the

blue empyrean? No, but a rocket—the opening gun, as it were, of the engagement between dark night and art, as ably represented by Pictorial Brown. Down came the rosy spangles, and scarcely had they died away into nothingness, before, with whiz and roar, a very galaxy of rockets rushed into the pale darkness of the sky; and as they burst into showers of fiery rain the cheers of the peasantry mingled with the spirit-stirring clangour of the music, which had awaited that instant to send forth its strains upon the balmy air of night. The arch of heaven was all alight with what a heated imagination might well have taken for flaming dragons or serpents of fire, each leaving its glittering train behind it, as it soared, curved, and fell in glorious ruin. Down poured, as if tossed forth by the capricious largess of an elfin queen, now a shower of rubies, now a rain of emeralds, and anon a flying heap of shining gold. Quick were the changes, as the air at one moment seemed spangled with pure blue

sapphires, and in the next was loaded with tumbling amethysts, and then flushed with rosy the hue of the hyacinth, the blood-red of the garnet, the fiery orange of the topaz. The hail of rockets ceased as suddenly as it began, and then a murmur of expectation ran through the crowd as dark figures became dimly visible upon the summit of the flag tower. The illumination of the Castle itself had been reckoned upon as the chief effect, or, to use the words of Pictorial Brown, the "hit" of the evening; and all eyes were strained upon the outlines of the battlemented old mansion that seemed to frown so sternly through the deepening shadows, like a stony Sphinx that resented the being dragged thus into the glare of publicity. The band played on, but even the sweet sounds of the Hunters' Chorus of *Der Freischütz*, echoed back by rock and wood, could not distract the attention of the crowd from the crenellated turrets of the old border fortress. The multitude seemed all eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO SISTERS.

It is reckoned by persons who are passing through the stages of that delicious folly—as incomprehensible to those whose tough epidermis preserved them from Cupid's archery, as is music to the deaf or colour to the blind—which we name love, that there is solitude in a crowd. Two young people, in the midst of numbers who are too much engrossed with their own occupation to keep watch and ward over their neighbours, can feel the charm of being alone together, while yet the contagion of the popular excitement helps to lend a zest to their soft nothings, to the exchange of looks and words and sighs, which might be lacking were they really the sole inha-

bitants of a desert. Most especially is this the case beneath the trembling stars, and on such festal occasions as that of the garden party at Crag Towers. It would not be easy to enumerate how many flirtations, on that pleasant evening, passed from the period of innuendo and hint and semi-playful talk to that of avowal and acceptance; how many young gentlemen went home that night with a crushed rosebud, it may be, romantically bestowed inside a tightly buttoned waistcoat, and with a vague idea that, although it was a delightful victory to be made sure of Kitty's affection, yet the ordeal of "speaking to papa in the morning" was rather less "awfully jolly" than had been the troth-plight of the evening before.

There was to be dancing, so far as the tenantry were concerned, under a tent, and for the county notables within the house; but just now the fireworks and the promised illuminations were too powerful an attraction to be resisted, and the bulk

of the more aristocratic guests thronged the gardens, where coloured lamps hung, like the jewelled fruit in some underground pleasance of the gnomes, on the trees, and where light and shade had been skillfully alternated so as to tempt the explorer on from one smooth path to another—from this bright archway, propped by slender columns of pale gold, to that sombre depth of shadow at the remotest limits of which there twinkled invitingly something like a star. Here a clump of tall trees, linked together by ropes of roses, had been turned into a bower that might not have been disdained by Spenser's Faëry Queen: there a broad band of lustre spanned the green velvet of a level lawn. Tents of gaudily striped stuff, such as the wandering Moors of the Sahara weave, had started up, like so many mushrooms, amid the blossomed shrubs: and if the turbaned men, and the damsels with sequins plaited into the braids of their jetty hair, were not genuine importations from North Africa, at least they

offered refreshments with more than Arab hospitality to all who deigned to pause in front of their pavilion. Merry rippling laughter, the hum of voices, and the sweet soft music from the band that lay concealed in some ferny dell of the park, seemed to float harmoniously enough over the enchanted scene.

Here, then, was the very spot for lovers to be together, and so felt Craven Conyers as he slowly passed from one promenading group to another, seeking for a face that he had hitherto failed to find, when a light touch on his arm recalled his wandering thoughts, and, looking around, he saw that it was Adeline, not Nellie, who stood beside him.

“I would speak to you—a word only——” she said, and he noticed that her voice trembled, and that the gloved hand which she had laid upon his arm trembled too. “Shall we walk on together, for a little way, as the others do?” The captain readily assented, and they passed on, side

by side, and presently found themselves in a long walk, where the shrubs grew thickly on either hand, a dark wall of green, unilluminated save by a tiny lamp which glistened at intervals among the leaves, like the fire-flies of a hotter climate. Neither of them spoke. And yet Craven would have been sorely puzzled to explain the reasons for such silence. After all, he had been requested to listen, not to talk. "You are going to-morrow—going to leave us—cousin?" said Adeline at length.

"Yes, I must go," answered the young man, half perplexed; "it would never do for a sailor, whose business it is to knock about the world, to stay always at anchor, even in such tempting moorings as this." Now Craven, as a rule, was no more addicted to the use of nautical metaphors than the soldier of real life is given to talk martial "shop," about sabres and charges and the call of honour, as the traditions of novelists and dramatists prescribe. But he was a little afraid that

his beautiful cousin was about to grow sentimental over his approaching departure, and therefore took refuge in maritime platitudes.

"You are quite right," rejoined Adeline; "it would be unworthy of a man to allow himself to rust, like a neglected sword kept always sheathed, in the quiet repose to which women are fated. But, if you will forgive my rudeness in consideration for the sisterly interest that prompts it, have you chosen for the best—selected the goal the most worth reaching? You are fond of your profession, I know."

"I am," answered Craven cheerfully. "I have the old schoolboy delight in the sea, which wears off after a spell with most men, strong within me yet."

"It will be an evil day for England when boys, and men too, cease to love the blue water," said Adeline quickly; "and yet, cousin, I care too much for your welfare to have you sacrifice your best years to a dream. You, and such as you, are

drawn to a sea life by the traditions that cling to our navy still, dating from the days when it was the floating rampart that kept our island safe and free. But where, in these times, can laurels be reaped? You can hardly look for another great naval war, like that of long ago, and yet, without it, who are your enemies, save the winds and waves? It was not the romance of battling with the elements that first lured Englishmen to range the deep, was it?"

"No, on my word you are right there," rejoined the captain laughing. "Old Killick has had a better time of it than I, for gunpowder was still in fashion when he was a midshipman; but now, except for a few rascally slavers or a stray pirate beyond the Singapore Straits, we poor fellows haven't a chance of immortalizing ourselves. And there's little renown to be got by pounding the pigtails, or cutting out a becalmed slave dhow off Arabia. It is not our fault, is it, if we came into the world half a century too late to sail under

Nelson and Collingwood and the rest of them?"

"But, without renouncing the sea altogether," said Adeline persuasively, "might you not do better ashore? Am I wrong when I say that political strife has charms now for an Englishman which is lacking in all other careers? that the eyes of the nation, and of the world, are more and more fixed on the statesman, less and less on the warrior, and that——But you will laugh at me, Craven, that I meddle with topics beyond the range of my sex."

"Not at all," said the captain, catching in the fitful gleam of the lamp nearest them a glimpse of the flushed, beautiful face of his companion. "By Jove, you speak capitally, and I dare say, if such a thing had been possible, that I might have liked very well to have my fling in Parliament—not but that, I suspect, I should have cut a poor figure there. I don't profess to be one of the clever ones."

"You are honest though, cousin; and

brave too," answered Adeline earnestly, "qualities that carry weight with them at St. Stephen's as well as on the quarter-deck. And I should so dearly love to hear of your success, to share, though from afar off, your triumphs, to hope with your hopes, and sympathize with your struggles. I could fancy that it might be a wife's pride to cheer her husband when he returned, baffled and weary, from the strife of clashing factions, to keep alive his hope when all the horizon seemed dark, to joy in his joy, and sorrow when ill-fortune came, and then, at last, to glory as none other could do, when at last the prize was won, and the beloved name was echoed through the land from lip to lip, as that of one deserving of his countrymen's esteem. I could fancy—but—but—what must you think of me?" she added, in broken accents, and she hid her face with her slender hands, and averted her head. But a moment earlier, there had been in her voice the unmistakable ring

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of true enthusiasm; her colour had been heightened; her eyes had flashed, star-like, as they met those of the young sailor, fascinated, despite himself, by the fire of her words and the brilliancy of her beauty; and now her manner had changed—abruptly changed. Her bosom heaved wildly, and there were tears in her proud eyes. She dashed them away.

“We will go back, if you please,” she said in a subdued tone, as she turned her face towards the lights and the crowd; “many of our guests are wondering, no doubt, what has become of their hostess, and—I had no right——” Here she broke down, and sobbed audibly.

Craven was melted at once. He took Adeline’s hand between his own and pressed it. “I am afraid,” he said, “that you are not happy. I should be very sorry, very sorry indeed, if I thought that I—by thoughtlessness, or the harum-scarum way we sailors have, had——” He came to a dead lock here, and grew red in the face.

Had he not been on the point of expressing to this beautiful young woman his coxcombical hopes that she was not in love with him? True, her words and her manner had pointed to some such conclusion, but there are things which a man must not say. He had spoken the simple truth. He would have given very much that Adeline, his cousin, might regard him as a cousin only. That such was not the case he feared, not hoped. Yet he was angry with himself for knowing that he was pleased with the flattery of her preference. Even a young sea captain is but a mortal man, and shares the common weakness of male humanity. Of the two, Adeline was then the strongest and most self-possessed. Her momentary emotion, which had broken through the dykes of lady-like restraint, was over, and the training of years caused her to prove equal to the situation.

"We will not, Cousin Craven, say another word, if you please, that trenches upon dangerous ground," she said steadily;

“I have duties to which I must attend, and so we had better go back. This is an exciting evening, you know, for a young hostess like myself; it would be different, would it not, had I a mother living!” There was a slight tremulous tone in her clear voice here, and Craven bent over her and pitied her with the most chivalrous compassion, for the feelings which he supposed her to have. She had deserved pity, whatsoever her faults, a few minutes earlier—not now. Now she was acting a part. She acted it better still as they mingled with the gay groups nearer the house, and as Adeline’s ringing voice and Adeline’s bright smile inspired those around her with renewed admiration for one whose pride lent an additional charm to the witching grace with which she did the honours of Crag Towers.

“Poor girl!” said Craven half regretfully, as he wandered on alone, “I never knew before what women could go through with a smiling face but an aching heart. On my

soul, I'm sorry for her, and if I knew how I could——” But here his soliloquy was cut short, as his eyes lit on a little fairy-like form, a dainty, pretty face, a sweet little head, wreathed around by glossy braids of dark hair.

“Nellie!” he said, eagerly springing forward, and in an instant, such is the magic of love, Adeline and her stately beauty and her hidden sorrows were as dreams of the past, and Craven saw but the girl he loved, and she him. For all intents and purposes, in spite of the crowd and the show, they two were alone in the world—their Eden. Nellie's sudden blush, the love-light that sparkled in the eyes over which, an instant later, the coy lids drooped so heavily, betrayed her secret. But Craven knew it already. To him the whole situation, leaving Adeline out, resumed itself, as our French friends say, briefly enough. He loved his cousin Nellie, and she him. But he was poor, and he must go to-morrow, and——To how many couples, since the

world was a world, have those self-same words applied !

“I have been looking for you everywhere,” said the captain, crossing the gravel walk, to take, as it were, possession of his gentle cousin ; and Nellie, willingly enough, allowed him to lead her away.

Side by side they walked for some instants, heedless of the rush and glitter of the rockets overhead, scarcely aware of the dulcet strains of the music that reached their ears as if it had been a mere echo of the horns of elf-land, living for the time in that inner world that exists only for the loving and the loved. It might have been long before the silence would have been broken had it been for Nellie to speak the first word. No lotos eater can live more thoroughly in the present, shutting out the dismal future, than is done every day by a girl when in company with him she loves. But Craven, as belonging to the discontented sex, was the first to disturb this soft dream of unreasoning happiness.

"I asked you to walk with me a little way," he said, looking straight before him as he spoke, "because I am going to-morrow. You remember that?"

"Yes, I remember." How Nellie's poor little lip trembled as she uttered these words in a low voice that she strove to render firm. After a pause Craven went on:

"I did not think when I came to visit here this time, how hard I should find it to go away, or what a wrench it would be to tear myself from you."

Nellie's heart was beating fast now. It was not without an effort that she could force herself to utter the words of her reply: "We shall all be so sorry to lose you." It seemed a safe answer. Women are taught to find safety in the commonplace, and this rejoinder would have been approved of by a picked jury of English mammas.

"Do you know why I shall be sorry, Nellie, if that be the word?" said the captain, turning towards his cousin for

the first time since they had walked together; "not for leaving the dear old place that always seemed a second home to me, or my kind uncle, your father, who seemed half angry with me yesterday because I told him I didn't owe a sixpence, in reply to his generous offer of help in clearing off the debts he took to be a matter of course—no, *that* I could face cheerfully enough, hoping to find all here as I left it when next I am on shore. Can't you guess, Nellie, why it is that I feel the tug of parting so much?"

Nellie looked down at the gravel of the path on which they stood, at her fan, at the bracelet on her wrist, at anything but Craven's face, and she tried to say "No," but the fib could not find utterance.

"Only because in parting with you, my dear, I leave behind me what I prize most in the world—that's all!" exclaimed the young sailor passionately; "only because I love you, Nellie, my darling—love you with all my heart!"

As he said the last words he took her hand. It quivered in his grasp, but she made no effort to release it. He had spoken, then. True, he had told her nothing that she had not known before, but the plunge had been taken, the filmy pretence of mere cousinly affection brushed away. A woman's happiest moment, it has often been said, is this of fair and candid avowal of an honest love on the part of the chosen one. Nine times out of ten, the conventional surprise is lacking, but it is none the less sweet to receive the positive assurance of what was before so delightfully uncertain.

And now Nellie began to cry, not wholly in sorrow, not wholly in joy, but with that strange blending of the opposite emotions that love has the privilege to evoke. "I am a clumsy wooer, I am afraid," said Craven, half angry with himself, "and I have distressed and startled you by my stupid bluntness, but I could not pick my words in a gale of wind—I mean——" And

then, as he began to grow confused in his speech, his pretty companion began to laugh softly, with the bright tears clinging to her jetty eyelashes.

“Not at all clumsy, not at all stupid,” she said, nestling close to him and looking bashfully down as before, “it is I who am foolish; we girls are easily made to cry and—and——” It was left for the young commander to complete the sentence if he could.

“If I had thought that my telling the truth would cause you pain, my love,” he said tenderly, “I would have gone away from here without breathing a word as to what I feel. But—I hope I am not a puppy, Nellie, for fancying such a thing—I have thought, dear one, sometimes, that you cared for me—a little.” No answer, only a sob, and the fact that the sweet face was bent more resolutely downwards than ever. “Is it true?” Twice he repeated the question, bending down, and trying to get a glimpse of her blushing face. “Tell

me, Nellie, is it true?" She stole one upward glance at him, smiling through her tears.

"Yes," she whispered, in so low a tone that it took a lover's thirsty ear to drink in the sweet syllable, surely the most delicious combination of letters in our English alphabet. And then the captain put his arm around her waist and drew her to him, and stooped to kiss her upturned face, and there was one brief space of pure unalloyed happiness such as would serve for an oasis on which to look regretfully back through the weary wilderness of a joyless existence, a minute never to be forgotten by either.

Reflection came to Craven the first, and he sighed as he addressed himself to the task that lay before him. "I never felt my poverty," he said, and for him almost bitterly, "as I feel it now. Hitherto I have never known the need of money. Now I do—now that the want of it puts a barrier across the path of my fondest

hopes. You and I, my dear, love one another—thank Heaven for that—yet I am beginning to doubt whether I was not selfish to speak as I have done. When an honest man tells a girl that he loves her, surely he should ask her to be his wife! And what sort of reception shall I meet with when I go to Sir Peregrine to crave his consent to his daughter's union with a well-born beggar like myself? Yet to-morrow I must go to him and tell him all, even though I offend him by the avowal."

"Cruel, cruel," said Nellie, reproachfully, as she looked up in Craven's face with pleading eyes, "to spoil my little moment of pleasure so soon. We are poor, my own, but we are young too, are we not? and can wait. Oh yes, we can wait."

"Wait till I am an admiral, I suppose," said Craven, kissing her again. "I am an ungrateful hound, after all, Nellie dearest, to repine against Dame Fortune in the very hour that I have been enriched by a treasure in your fond heart, dear girl, beyond gold and

diamonds. But it is true, dear girl, that I am poor, and, by the world's standard, have no claim to marry. A trifle I have by way of income, and it has been enough for one of my profession; but I am afraid, putting together my slender means and my commander's pay, the home that I could offer to my wife would be a very humble one. Many a married pair, as I know, face life on less, and I should have no hesitation in asking you, Nellie, to share the fireside of even such a one as I am—unexperienced as you have yet been in the buffets and privations that go along with genteel poverty—but then, Sir Peregrine!”

“You are right, Craven,” said Nellie, with her hand in his, “right to suppose that I would not flinch from narrow fortunes and from hardships even, could we but meet them together. I am not very extravagant by nature, and grandeurs do not suit me as they suit Adeline. But then, dear, I could never marry, whatever the temptation, should my father forbid it. He is fond of

me, certainly, but you know the strength of his opinions—prejudices perhaps would be the truer word. I dare not expect that he should let me follow the dictates of my own heart. He would think it but a girl's weak fancy that drew me towards you, and, were it otherwise, I am only too sure of his answer to venture on talking with him on such a subject. No, we must have patience and we will think of one another very often, won't we? and wait until you are a great man, sir, famous, as I hope you will be, some day, and then papa will see things differently, and——" She did not finish the sentence, but her delicate fingers returned the pressure of the hand that enclosed them.

"Well, well," said the captain, repressing, though with difficulty, the inclination to launch out into a fierce diatribe against the worship of the golden calf of rank and wealth, natural to a man in his position; "you read me a lesson in patience, Nellie, and I must try to be good and not cry for

the moon, I suppose. And yet—I won't insult you, dear, by the suggestion that you may see another, when I am far away, that will make you forget poor seafaring Cousin Craven; but still what the Belgravian matrons, in their jargon, call an eligible *parti*, may present himself, armed with Sir Peregrine's approval, and then——”

“Have no doubts on that score,” said Nellie, speaking fearlessly for once; “there are limits to even a parent's authority, Craven, and you need not dread lest papa should force me into a marriage against my will. Such things are very rare, I fancy, now in England; and I have enough of a woman's spirit to enable me to be firm when I feel I am in the right. I cannot disobey my father, cannot marry in defiance of his commands, but there is the utmost of my submission. No, dear, you take with you my solemn promise, freely given and faithfully to be kept, to be no other man's wife than yours, and to love you always, and wait and hope and pray for you when on the sea, my own one.”

"Tell me, Nellie dear, how long it is since you have cared for me," asked Craven, stooping his head until her glossy hair almost touched his face.

"I have loved you all my life," answered the girl, with a shy frankness, if such there be.

"And I you, darling, my own darling!" exclaimed Craven as again he pressed his lips to her soft cheek. But at that instant a loud cheer from the crowd in the park broke in upon their loving forgetfulness of the external world, and a bright glare of light suddenly made all that part of the garden as distinctly visible as if the sun had newly risen, but with a strange and startling effect, that had in it something weird and wild. It was a rosy radiance at first, then a crimson glow, then a blood-red blaze, that lit up every leaf and flower, the uplifted faces of the crowd, the park, the flowing river, the turrets and battlements of the mansion, with its ruddy lustre. The light was most intense upon the lofty flag-

tower of the castle, for now the long-looked-for illuminations had commenced, and Nellie and Craven, no longer mantled around by the friendly shadows of evening, were glad to mingle unobserved with the promenaders near the boundary of the garden, which commanded the best view of the proceedings.

CHAPTER V.

OFF THE STAGE.

SCARCELY had the darkness swallowed up the red glow that had bathed castle and park and rock and river in its ruby flood of lustre, before its rich hues were succeeded by a glare of blue fire, leaping up from belfry and turret-top and battlemented wall, and flinging a ghastly gleam as far as the ferny haunts of the startled deer. It seemed but a phantom world—a world peopled with spectres, and given over to vain regrets and sad memories—that was viewed through the medium of that pale, cold light; and there were those among the spectators who shivered as though a blast of cold wind had suddenly chilled the balmy summer air, and were glad when

Pictorial Brown allowed the curtain of night to fall upon this unearthly and, as the Aberdonian head-gardener pithily styled it, "gruesome" sight. Then from the flag-tower there poured down a dazzling stream of pure brightness, severely testing the complexions of the fairer portion of the company, and showing every twig and leaflet on the boughs, every tiny stone in the smooth gravel of the paths, the indentations in the weather-beaten frontage of the old house, and, quite impartially, every peculiarity of dress or features among the many who looked on. Some one said it was the Lime Light, but almost before its radiance had disappeared, there dawned upon the tower-top another and a fiercer brilliance, before which every eye drooped, as before the sun, while the upturned faces seemed white, as if terror had blanched them. As if one beacon answered to another, as in the old time of war, another electric light flamed out on Welshmen's Hill, another on the distant Pulpit Rock,

and for a few brief seconds it seemed as if space had been annihilated, and the old camp and Wild Will's Ford were within arm's length of the gazing crowd.

The music struck up again, and as it did so, the vivid radiance of the three beacons gave place to a crimson glow that gradually deepened and widened, as if a furnace mouth had been opened, until the rushing Wye seemed to run red with blood, between ruddy rocks and green sward and groves and gardens; the grim border fortress, and the pretty gardens that had taken the place of moat and outworks, were stained to the same ominous hue. Next, all was silvery bright, pure, and peaceful, as if Pictorial Brown had had the moon at his command, and had directed a flood of summer moonlight towards crag and stream. Next, showers of flaming gold seemed to fall on rock and river, on tower and turret, on the antlered herds that had huddled their ranks together, as though to find safety in numbers, on the hill-

terrace opposite, on the meek brooklet of the Kightle trickling down to join the Wye, on the Welshmen's lofty camp, and in many a nook and corner of the picturesque homelandscape, that never before had looked so beautiful. The surprises now came thick and fast. A blaze of garish magenta, softened down into purest rose-pink, or cooled into modest mauve, which was in its turn succeeded by such a shade of pale green lustre as might have suited well to irradiate the revels of a troop of midnight fairies. But what produced the greatest effect on the imagination of the spectators was the bursting out, in all manner of unsuspected lurking places in the woods, of red fires that glowed lurid through the midst of the trees, as though twenty robber bivouacs were established within Sir Peregrine's demesne, and the skill with which the great Brown had planted the pyrotechnic ambuscades which were now unmasked.

It was a sight worth the seeing. The dark background of the waving woods set

off the sparkling gewgaws that blazed away their little lives in jewelled splendour. The resources of those ingenious artists who daily handle explosive materials, and whose stock-in-trade is the terror of neighbours and the scapegoat of the police, are, after all, limited. The Catherine wheels that revolve so brilliantly to-night are twin sisters to those that amazed our childish eyes. All that could be done with sky-rockets was known, quite as well as it is known now, at those luckless betrothals of Louis the Dauphin with Marie Antoinette, when an alarm of fire, and the rush of a panic-stricken mob, cost Paris the lives or limbs of seven hundred sight-seers. Those Roman candles that curve so gracefully in their flight, were first launched from the castle of St. Angelo, long before the French tricolour had been hoisted above the standard of the Keys. The balls of blue fire that traverse the air were used by the Chinese, before Troy—if ever there was a Troy—was taken.

The fountains that run with fire, the palm trees and ostrich plumes and spreading roses of fire, the revolving orreries that radiate around a ruby heart of flame, are not new. It is because the eyes that look on them are new, that they create, in a hushed crowd, such breathless astonishment and infantine ecstasy of delight. The fiery serpents that hiss and writhe in their passage through the air, the fiery rain of the rockets, the spray of fire that is flung and tossed in reckless profusion from temple and tower and cross and wheel of the ephemeral structures that are put together with hammer and nails, these things pleased our grandsires. Perhaps, in spite of the schoolmaster, they may please our grandchildren too.

It was felt by those present at the garden party, that they owed some thanks to their liberal entertainer for providing a spectacle which would be looked back to through a vista of years, so utter and complete had been the success which fine

weather and unstinted expenditure had brought about. "How sweetly pretty, Sir Peregrine!" "Lovely!" "Celestial!" "Fairy-like!" "A dream of beauty!" "Transcendent!" Such were a few, taken at random, of the encomiums on the fête of his providing, in this its crowning display, that were poured into the baronet's ear as he moved among his more aristocratic guests. It is needless to say that these praises were all uttered by feminine lips. Superlatives and sentiments are alien to the lips of a young Englishman, or an old one either, living in the eighth decade of the nineteenth century. Sir Peregrine was pleased even by these trite eulogiums on his social field-day. He could not bring himself to say, as a greater victor than he had done, when congratulated, "All Brown, all Brown!" but he felt as if the compliments were really due to the able adviser who had turned an ordinary party into a glimpse of fairy-land.

Where, meanwhile, was Adeline, the

maiden hostess, for whom so many looked eager to yield their meed of thanks for the forethought and taste which had ministered so abundantly to their pleasure? Assuredly, none would have thought of identifying her, so highly placed in the world's esteem, and bearing herself so royally in its presence, with the figure, half crouched, half reclining on the turf, in a far-off corner of the large garden, where a rustic seat of unbarked wood had stood neglected for years. She had flung herself down on the grass there (careless of the possible damage to a dress for the perfecting of which Mademoiselle Flouncey, or some other Court milliner, had for eighty hours deprived more than one of her pallid "young persons" of their natural rest), had thrown her arms on the rude bench, and had buried her head between her arms, weeping wildly, as none but those who own stormy hearts like hers know how to weep. The light, the splendour, the sparkle of the show without, seemed to add

a bitterer contrast to the sufficiently striking one that existed between this beautiful, despairing woman and the outward grandeurs of her lot. She appeared almost convulsed, as she lay sobbing beside the rustic bench, the hot tears bringing no relief to the torture of her mental agony.

Was it regret or remorse or the pang of baffled hopes alone, that her dilated eyes expressed, as she at length upraised her face towards the pale stars and the violet sky? Her very guests, at that moment, would hardly have known her. Who that had only seen her in the strength of her loveliness, would have recognized in that distorted face the almost perfect features of their cold and beautiful hostess, whose rare smiles had won all hearts that night? She struck her clasped hands once and again on the rough wood-work, moaning the while like a child in pain. She was alone now, and might suffer, without hiding the fact of her sufferings.

And yet she was not, in that moment of self-abandonment, quite alone. Her ears had surely played her false, since they had not warned her of the stealthy footsteps that had tracked hers, as the wolverine steals through the moss-grown trees by which the grazing elk has passed, unsuspecting of the enemy close behind. There was an eager face peering at her through the shadows of the night, from behind the smooth trunk of the beech tree: a face that she had learned already, in her inmost soul, to fear—the face of the boy who must one day be lord of all the ample possessions of Conyers. It was Darrell who watched her thus.

“Proud woman!” he murmured between his set teeth, as he observed her wild look upwards at the darkling sky, “you remind me, as you lie there, of a tigress that bites the dust in furious agony, beside the bait cunningly set in the depths of the jungle, a poisoned arrow in her side. Do the poor villagers pity the striped, glossy-skinned

destroyer that has lurked for months around their huts, hiding behind the well where the girls come with their water-pitchers, prowling beside the forest path where the young herd-lad must pass with his file of buffaloes; the great, beautiful wild cat, whose prey is men, not mice? Haughty, fair-faced deception, that you are; you, who have trampled on me since first I crossed the threshold of this splendid home of mine, beware! Darrell, forsooth, was a hindrance in your path. Darrell's birth was humble, was it, on the mother's side? and you—being what you are—would have crushed Darrell's spirit and blighted his hopes had he been made of softer stuff. Why, it is you, superb Adeline, who are at my mercy, not I at yours, as your looks often imply! I know your secret, lady; and did I but choose to breathe it in the midst of all that gay company"—he almost laughed aloud, as the idea crossed his mind—"Ah, well!" he added, after a moment's thought, "there are edge-tools that it is best not

to play with, lest they cut one's fingers. Some day, perhaps, my turn may come to strike a safe and easy blow. For the moment it is something to see her humbled, although, as she fancies, before no other than herself."

Some stick cracking beneath Darrell's foot as he withdrew, or the rustling of the branches against which his retiring form had brushed, caused Adeline to start from her recumbent position, and anxiously to strive to look into the gloomy thickets near her. Beyond, there was a dim reflection of the glow and glitter of the fireworks; and the sound of human voices, and of the music of the band, reached her with perfect distinctness. But close at hand she now heard but the sigh of the night wind, while, strain her eyes as she might, she could see nothing but the trees and shrubs.

"Some squirrel, perhaps, stirring among the beech-trees," she said, as she began to adjust her dress, and to prepare for rejoining the company; "its passage has

done me a service, however, in reminding me that my time is not my own, and that I am not even free to mourn, when Society exacts the payment of her debt."

When Adeline did at length rejoin the spot where, as she expected, the principal guests were stationed, she became conscious of an inextinguishable tittering, suppressed, for a time, with well-bred discretion by those around, but breaking out afresh so soon as a decent space intervened between the laughers and the unconscious source of their amusement. This was no other than a stranger, whose ill-fitting suit of black, unbrushed hat, and shoes powdered to whiteness with the dust of the highway, looked incongruous enough with the gay attire of those who surrounded him.

It was not, however, the new-comer's loose clothes, unkempt hair, or slovenly aspect, which had provoked the risible faculties of the well-dressed throng. A man of a different character would not have been derided because of the cut of his coat,

the dustiness of his foot-gear, or the tie of his cravat. It was the look of sheep-faced bewilderment, the shy perplexity as to whether to advance or retreat, which the unfortunate adventurer exhibited, that caused him to be the observed of all. There he stood, an umbrella in one red-knuckled hand, a pair of crumpled gloves firmly grasped in the other, the very type of indecision, like some ungainly elder brother of the Beauty that strayed unbidden into the Beast's garden. There the unlucky man stood, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and longing, but not daring, to make his escape.

"One of Brown's people, I suppose, that has come down rather late from London, and does not know what to do, or where he is wanted," suggested the marquis good-naturedly; for already several suggestions had been hazarded as to the shabby stranger being a metropolitan pickpocket, or area sneak, at the Towers with sinister intentions as to spoons and other portable property.

"And such a creature!" remarked Lady Neville; "but perhaps that is to heighten the contrast when he turns into a harlequin, or whatever it is."

The idea was eagerly passed from group to group.

"Italian opera tenor," said one.

"Japanese juggler," hinted another.

"More like rope-dancing and the trapeze, I should say," pronounced a third.

"How do you do, Mr. Meanwell? Have you seen my grandfather yet?" said Darrell, coming briskly forward to the rescue of his old tutor; and the Reverend Mark clung to the boy's hand as if it had been stretched out to save him from drowning.

"I—I'm afraid I'm very much out of place here, and so on;" said the poor scholar, looking helplessly down at his dust-sprinkled garments and clumsy shoes; "but I didn't know anything of these grand doings, I assure you. I arrived an hour or two ago, and found nobody at the vicarage, but a deaf old woman, and I

inquired my way round here by the road, wishing to lose no time in presenting my respects to Sir Peregrine Conyers, and——”

Sir Peregrine could not repress a start, and a keen pang of annoyance, as his eyes suddenly encountered those of the new Vicar of Gridley Green. It requires no trifling degree of courage to claim as an acquaintance, and still more so as a relative, the ridiculous person who is the butt of a company.

Darrell had acknowledged Mr. Meanwell's identity with a good grace, but then the fearless boy seemed to possess the innate gift of carrying all things with a high hand.

It was otherwise with the proud baronet, who would have given much to have been spared the necessity of introducing to the cream of the cream of county society this very objectionable-looking person as Darrell's uncle, the brother of his dead son's wife, and the incumbent of a living at his own park gates. It cost Adeline, too, an effort, before she could bring herself to

bestow a decorous welcome, publicly, on Mr. Meanwell. But Nellie's greeting was kind towards the forlorn stranger, and Craven also came forward and shook the Reverend Mark's hand heartily enough.

Presently the festivities of the evening were over. The last dance was danced, the last rocket had faded into dust and ashes, the last glass of champagne had been emptied, the last tankard of ale drained. The volunteers had marched, their band keeping but unsteady time as they defiled through the park, while carriages came round in profusion, with all the whipping and reining up, the locking of wheels and slamming of doors, inseparable from the "taking up" of a large and heterogeneous company returning home late at night in the country. Most of the guests rolled off along the so-called home-road, by which a considerable saving of time could be effected, and which was now in capital condition, since the dry weather had long since done away with the effects of the

heavy rains of spring. The last "good-night," the last "thanks for a delightful evening," were uttered and endured, and Crag Towers, sleeping peacefully beneath the stars, was hushed at length into its customary repose, without a sound being heard but the wash and murmur of the never-ceasing river below.

CHAPTER VI.

FAREWELL.

WHEN the family at Crag Towers met at breakfast on the day succeeding to that of the garden party, a marked difference was visible in the appearance of the two sisters. There were dark semicircles beneath Adeline's eyes, and she looked paler, and older, too, by some years, than was usual with her. But this change was very charitably attributed to fatigue; and certainly her duties as hostess on the previous evening had been sufficiently trying to excuse a few hours of feverish unrest. Nellie, on the other hand, was as fresh and charming as a rose-bud. There was something of piquancy added to her prettiness by the timid consciousness of the new bond that

existed between Craven and herself. Sir Peregrine was in his most gracious mood. The entertainment of yesterday had, in the first place, been a complete success, and to success no man can be indifferent. Then, his nephew was to leave the Towers on that day, and he liked his nephew well enough to desire their parting to be a cordial one. And again, so many voices had on the previous evening united in praise of Darrell, the grandson of whom he was growing daily more and more fond and proud, that he felt as if the general verdict of society had absolved the boy of the original sin of his mother's lowly birth, and had justified the tardy recognition of one who bade fair to be one of the noblest representatives of the ancient Conyers' line.

"I have a letter here," said the baronet, as breakfast came to a close, "from your worthy mother, Craven, asking, and I may say urging, us all to visit her in Paris this year, on her return from the seaside, and when the gaieties of the French capital

recommence. Now, it is long since I have left my home for more than a few days spent in London, but I feel, for once, very much inclined to accept my sister-in-law's hospitable invitation. I think," he added, smiling, "that I may answer for my girls' willingness to avail themselves of their aunt's kind offer. Adeline was always fond of France, and Nellie, though more English in her preferences, would probably be pleased by the change of scene. And I should like Darrell to see Paris."

Craven's departure was not fixed for a very early hour. Steam has so far abridged the distance between the Welsh border and London, that a traveller by express train can accomplish the journey without much sacrifice of ease or leisure. How many days, through mire and rain and flooded roads, had a company of King Harry's pikemen to plod towards the west, before they caught sight of the frowning mountains whence Glendower's wild Britons burst forth to carry fire and sword to Trent or

Severn! We are assuredly more comfortable, if no wiser, than our progenitors, and have at least contrived to divest locomotion of half the terrors which it possessed for the pilgrims of old. But the captain, as he caught Sir Peregrine in the library that morning, had little time or inclination to moralize over the superiority of our own epoch to the centuries that have gone before it. He had an errand to execute which honour forbade him to postpone, and yet from which he shrank, as many a brave man, in all ages of the world, has done. He had spent hours in endeavouring to shape the speech which he should address to his uncle, and, as often happens on such occasions, his carefully prepared sentences played him false when face to face with Sir Peregrine.

"I have come to tell you, sir," he said, "something which may, I fear, not be welcome news. I am in love with your youngest daughter, and last evening I, for the first time, ventured to speak to

Nellie on the subject that was nearest my heart."

"Indeed!" returned the baronet, arching his eyebrows; "I had thought you, Craven, by far too sensible a young man to be capable of what you must feel to be folly. You have not, however, as yet communicated to me the purport of my daughter's reply."

"Well, uncle, if you will have it so," answered the captain, "my cousin's reply was one which made me happy, since she gave me to understand that my love was returned, which would have made me the happiest fellow alive, if only we could have hoped for your approval to our engagement."

"Do you mean to tell me that you two consider yourselves to be engaged?" demanded Sir Peregrine, with some asperity, and more surprise. Love and love-making were indeed to him what the honeyed verse of Horace is to a pushing civil engineer: something quite irrelevant to his habitual train of thought. His own feelings had

always been perfectly under control. And, in truth, he had small sympathy with Cupid, seeing that that blindfold urchin had, in his opinion, dealt but shabbily with him in bringing about the one great sorrow of his life—the rebellious marriage of his own only son. Now, Sir Peregrine was aware that people fell in love, as he was aware that other people were more disreputably addicted to cigars and strong liquor, and he had almost as little fellow-feeling for the one class of weaklings as for the other.

“Not engaged, sir, certainly. And yet, in a sense, sir, we are,” answered Craven, in a tone that would have disarmed the anger of a sterner auditor than the baronet. “I mean that we are so far plighted in faith to one another that, if we cannot be married, we shall live and die single. But we can’t say we are engaged to be man and wife when your consent is lacking. And, believe me, uncle, I am not sanguine enough to have come to you to-day in the hope of

- getting that consent. I know, as well as
- you can tell me, that I can no more offer Nellie a home in any respect equal to that of her youth than I can buy the Koh-i-noor for her wearing. I am a poor sailor, only too lucky when I can kick about the world in a gunboat, and be a captain in earnest, instead of a titular one. But we are neither of us very old, and we can afford to wait for the chance of my being one day able to maintain a wife, as you would desire in the case of a daughter of yours."

Sir Peregrine fidgeted a good deal in his deep chair, and disarranged the papers that lay before him to a considerable extent, under the pretext of adjusting them, before he replied. He could not but feel touched somehow at the self-abnegation of Craven's last speech. He was rich, and yet the captain had neither asked directly of him, nor even implied the request, that he should make such a settlement on the young lovers as would enable them to marry. There were men, by no means so

who could afford to be liberal to a favourite daughter and to a son-in-law of whom personally he approved as much as, but for the question of money, I should approve of you, Craven. And why? Simply because with the iron-master or the mill-owner it would be a question of so many thousands paid over on the wedding-day, and so much the less of spare capital. These estates are, as you know, entailed. Were they not, as was the case so late as the reign of Queen Anne, I should regard it as a sacred trust to keep the property transmitted to me intact for my successors. It is equally out of the question, that for the short residue of my life, I should burthen the yearly rent-roll by heavy charges for Nellie's benefit. *Noblesse oblige!* A great landed proprietor has many calls upon him, and is, after all, scarcely more than a steward of what seems to be his own. No, Craven, I cannot hold out any hope that Nellie can ever be more to you than a cousin. The sooner you can both of you

come to your senses on that point, the better ! ”

“ I’m afraid, uncle,” said the young man ruefully, “ that that is a subject on which you and I shall not easily agree. I had no doubt, from the first, as to your answer, but having, without any deliberate design, believe me, won the affections of that dear girl, I had no choice but to come to you, openly and fairly, to speak my mind upon the matter. If you would but allow us to face the world together, on such slender means as I——”

“ Impossible ! ” interrupted Sir Peregrine ; “ and I suspect, Craven, that a year hence, when this sudden fancy has had time to cool, you will consider me as your best friend for having opposed a project so idle. How many gently nurtured young couples have we both seen dragging on a wretched life of debt and hardship ; every sting that poverty possesses being sharpened by the inequality of their present condition with that of earlier days. No,

no; it is the kindest plan, as well as the wisest, to trust that delay and reflection may teach you both to take the common-sense view of the affair. You have dealt well by me, nephew, in this—acted as frankly as my brother's son and a Conyers should have done. I must ask you to promise that you will not write to your cousin. The restriction may seem harsh, but I feel it my duty to impose it."

"I will not write, sir, until you give me leave to address your daughter," answered Craven a little unsteadily; "nor need what I have said make any difference in your plans—I mean as to the acceptance of my mother's invitation to Paris. You will not meet me there. Indeed, I shall be afloat again before the autumn, most likely. One thing I must solicit, however, before I go, and that is, that I may see Nellie again, and, if you do not object, alone."

"You shall see her, and alone, undoubtedly," returned Sir Peregrine rising; "nor

will I stipulate that you should make no attempt to unsettle the girl's mind, or to entangle her in any rash promise which could only be the source of lasting unhappiness. Your own sense of honour is a sufficient guarantee for this. The library, I think, will be the fittest place for your interview with your cousin." And the baronet was as good as his word, for within a very short space of his quitting the apartment, Nellie came timidly in, and stood, half abashed, before Craven, but looking exquisitely pretty, tender, and loving, in her own sweet, simple way.

"Alas, my dearest, it is only to say 'good-bye!' that I am here," said Craven, as he advanced to meet her; "my uncle has been kind, but it would need little less than a miracle to make him judge of matters such as these otherwise than by the world's straitest standard. And yet, as we stand here, Nellie, and as I look into that dear little face of yours, I seem to read in it courage and faith enough to qualify you

to be even the wife of a poor man, and if —well, I must not rail against the rubric of Belgravia! And I count myself as so lucky, darling, to be loved by you, that the remembrance of that bit of undeserved good fortune takes away half the pain of parting. We'll be brave, won't we, Nellie?" For he saw, as he took her hands within his own, and drew her towards him, that the bright tears were standing thickly in her pure eyes, and that she was now beginning for the first time to feel the bitterness of parting. She clung to him, now, weeping as if her heart would break.

"It is so hard, so very hard," sobbed out the girl, "to lose you so soon, and just when the world was beginning to seem so wonderfully pleasant, as if there could be no such thing as care or sorrow any more. Oh, Craven, since we are not rich enough to marry, you and I, why are we not poor enough, either? I would work for you, dear, and you for me, I know, ah, so willingly! There is not really any-

thing of the fine lady in me. I would change places to-morrow with a cottage girl, if only I had you to expect at home when the day's labour was done. A peasant's wife may do that. It is only those who belong to such a family as ours who are forbidden to be humble and happy."

Never before had Nellie showed signs of rebellion against that artificial system to which we conform, until some sharp turn of the social rack wrings from us a cry of anguish or a murmur of discontent. Nor did Craven at that moment feel as loyal to Mrs. Grundy as a well-principled young gentleman should have done. But the remembrance of Sir Peregrine's trust in him, and the common-sense which rarely deserts an honest man at his hour of need, nerved him to make the best of the situation. "My poor, dear Nellie," he said tenderly, "we must try, you and I, to wait patiently; and since the world is what it is, to obey its laws, so far as we can, without giving up our own true faith in

one another. My uncle, I can see, thinks he is acting for the best. He may, perhaps, see cause to alter his opinion later on. There are prizes, too, even in my overstocked profession ; and I have now something to work for beyond the mere whim that makes an active young fellow restless when unemployed. I think I have friends—I know that my mother has such—who have real influence with the grandees who give away ships and stations ; and now I can beg, as I never yet could quite bring myself to do. There will come a day yet, my darling, when all this sorrow we now feel will have passed away like a dream of the night, and only serve, by the remembrance of it, to give a zest to our new-fledged happiness.”

Still Nellie sobbed, and still she clung to Craven's shoulder, saying, in low, broken accents, “how hard, how very hard,” it was. “It seems to me,” she said simply, “that I have only just begun to live, and now——”

The captain consoled her as best he might, though more with soft words than with caresses; for had not his uncle put confidence in him, and was it not incumbent on him not to exact from her whom he loved one more pledge or promise than had been freely plighted to him on the previous night? And at last—for lovers' talk is reckless of time and its leaden, relentless pace—the hour of the real parting arrived, and Craven felt that he must tear himself away.

“Good-bye, my own dear one!” said the young man somewhat huskily, as he bent to kiss the sweet, trustful face that was lifted so wistfully towards his. “I must not write, but I shall need nothing to keep fresh in my memory what I am leaving now. Come! a sailor's wife should be brave, you know, my darling. It is but for a time.” And he kissed her, and felt the answering touch of her soft lips upon his cheek, and some few minutes later the carriage had driven off rapidly, as he

looked back from the window towards the porch, with eyes not quite as clear as they had been in many a storm at sea, and many a skirmish among the mangrove creeks; and saw the outlines of female forms, and the waving of a white handkerchief. But, as he guessed, it was Adeline to whom the handkerchief belonged, not Nellie. Poor Nellie had enough to do to play the part that custom enforces on all civilized beings, and to feign, not over successfully, that mild regret which we are all conventionally supposed to feel on parting with an intimate guest and near relative.

So now Craven was gone, and Nellie, who loved him so dearly, felt as if the departure which had bereaved her of him had left her almost alone in the world. Her father was not unkind, but neither was he one with whom she could talk concerning the absent only one. He had, briefly, given her to understand that the subject of her and her cousin's "fancy" was one to which he desired no further

allusion to be made. Adeline might have been a more natural confidante, but, warned by some newly sprung instinct, she half mistrusted Adeline. Nor did the manner of the haughty elder sister invite confidence.

CHAPTER VII.

TUTOR AND PUPIL.

“WHAT do you think of our new vicar?” Such was the question that was asked and answered, with variations, in a great many social circles; from the bar of the *Conyers Arms* to the Laurestinum Cottages and Myrtle Lodges that *will* spring up in healthy and picturesque parishes such as that of Gridley Green. And, perhaps, the most characteristic reply was that of an old woman, notable in the village for accuracy of opinion, who pronounced “parson” to be “a tidy sort, if on’y he could clear his brains from the muddle they’d got into,” adding that, as it was, he seemed “as out of place as a bear in a boat.” And though it may be doubted if Dame Pratt had ever

seen boat and bear in conjunction, the simile was by no means inappropriate to the figure which the Reverend Mark Meanwell made in his new office. He had gone through his morning and afternoon services, and had preached his two sermons, on the Sunday succeeding his unexpected appearance at the garden party at Sir Peregrine's, and, as he flattered himself, tolerably well. But he had yet to learn that a clergyman has duties to perform which require tact as well as industry, and that he could hardly satisfy some of his flock without discontenting others. A parish, after all, is a microcosm of the larger world outside, and poor Mr. Meanwell soon found that there were within the limits of his cure of souls, warring parties that agreed in nothing but in desiring to use the new incumbent as the oriental princes of old employed elephants in battle.

Would Mr. Meanwell "give it hot and hot" to the Agricultural Union that held its meetings at a free beer-house just

outside the boundary of Sir Peregrine's estate, and so oblige Farmer Styles, who was at internecine war with such of his best labourers as had listened to the piping of what the farmer called "foreign delegates," bent on leading ploughmen astray? Would he gratify a small but talkative faction, consisting of three ladies and a retired spectacle-maker, and put his pulpit at the service of the Maine Liquor Law? His sermons were mildly objected to, as being "colourless," by a few connoisseurs in sermons; and a knot of parishioners whose views were more decided than those of their vicar, requested him to pick up the gauntlets which, they informed him, had been thrown, on three successive Sundays, by the preacher at the Ebenezer at the opposite end of the village, and combat like a Sacheverel for the Church's claims. The very yeomen who were his churchwardens, and the lawyer who was his vestry clerk, strove to guide him in the direction most con-

venient to themselves. The guardians of the poor had something to say in regard to his ministrations to the Union; and he was warned of the perversity of pauper inmates of "the house," who persisted in thinking that their ague and rheumatism were the better for quinine and port wine, and of rickety pauper children who would take off as much cod-liver oil, and more, than the meek doctor dared to prescribe.

Pulled backwards and forwards by the representatives of conflicting interests, the Reverend Mark, who till then had had but scanty experience of what may be called parish politics, found a stout ally in old Commodore, or Captain, Killick. That veteran of the seas had abundance of courage and shrewdness, and was not disposed to be very lenient, perhaps, to any hobbies but those that he himself had bitted and bridled; and on him, and on his niece, Miss Grace, Mr. Meanwell was very much inclined to rely when embarrassed by the rival pretensions of

those who sought to mould him to their purpose. The new vicar had, indeed, been much struck by Grace's pretty, intelligent face when first he ascended the reading-desk in his own church, and took a timorous view of his congregation, an unusually large one, since several of those who habitually "sat under" the ministrations of him of the Ebenezer, had been tempted by curiosity to witness the maiden performance of the fresh incumbent; while others, whose attendance at any place of worship was but fitful and spasmodic, had trudged across the field-paths to hear what "new parson" had to say for himself. Even burly Farmer Styles, the largest occupier in the parish, a fat-headed, plethoric man, who commonly dozed away his Sundays over a yard of clay and a tankard of ale, and who preferred, like the late Lord Chancellor Eldon, to support the Church from the outside, had brought his nineteen stone of solid flesh to listen to the man to whom he looked to preach

new-fangled notions out of the heads of his diggers and delvers.

Darrell it was who brought the commodore to call at the vicarage, two days after Mr. Meanwell's first exercise of his spiritual functions ; and somewhat of an intimacy quickly sprang up between Captain Killick's household and the new incumbent. Grace did not smile at the ungainly figure and uncouth ways of the poor tutor, partly because it was not in her generous nature to inflict mortification on any one, however open to ridicule, and partly because she thought that she saw the signs of sterling worth beneath that rugged exterior. Nor was she far mistaken, for, uncongenial as might be some of the duties which Mr. Meanwell had now taken upon himself, he felt and showed a most sincere desire to execute them honestly. The poor and needy soon found that they had a friend the more since the vicarage was again tenanted ; and, indeed, the Reverend Mark, where giving was in question,

was rather apt to err on the side of over credulity and too open a hand. Grace, who knew the habits and the necessities of every humble family in the village, proved an invaluable counsellor in the dilemmas into which the new occupant of the parsonage would otherwise have floundered helplessly; while the particularists, who had looked on the Reverend Mark as a sort of ecclesiastical artillery to be used for the confusion of opponents, gave up their efforts in despair when they found themselves routed by the unsparing logic and vigorous sarcasms of the tough old commodore.

It must not be supposed that Captain Killick, in coming so promptly to the rescue of Mr. Meanwell, in his contests with those who presumed on his inexperience and constitutional inability to say "No," was himself entirely disinterested. Like most other fussy and self-important gentlemen of his time of life, he knew and dearly prized the value of a new listener.

And the Reverend Mark Meanwell possessed this passive accomplishment to an extent that would have drawn down upon him the rhythmical shower-bath of the confidences of Southey's *Ancient Mariner*, in all its wordy terrors. Even the helpless air with which he contemplated the famous clock, always wrong, but lauded and commended above all other horologes of what degree soever, was a passport in itself to the old seaman's goodwill. The commodore's ingenious devices for saving space which nobody wanted, and time that lay fallow, had never been inspected with more of admiring wonder than was now the case. To judge by the conversations that ensued over these cunningly-designed inutilities, Captain Killick might have been a mere scientific Robinson Crusoe, and the Reverend Mark an amiable savage of the Man Friday type. And yet Mr. Meanwell, who possessed many estimable qualities, was no fool. He was merely a bookish man. His working life had been so

occupied by words and phrases, so little by facts, that the practical attainments of the commodore were to him not only remarkable, but strangely real. He himself knew much, very much, of which the old naval officer had no inkling at all, but he was quite content to be patronized, and accepted the part of second fiddle with the blandest equanimity.

It may be, that one of the commodore's chiefest merits, in Mr. Meanwell's eyes, was that he was Grace's uncle. Love at first sight, we are taught, is a plant that cannot ripen in our humid, chilly climate, as it does in glowing Spain or ardent Italy. And, certainly, the Reverend Mark was, in personal appearance and bearing, excessively unlike the Romeo whom we fancy under Juliet's balcony, as the white stars look down into the sleeping streets of Mantua, and not a sound is heard but the far-off brawling of some noisy revellers, or the fainter twangling of a guitar from the wine shop at the corner of the piazza.

Nevertheless, it is true that this raw-boned, bashful student did experience, very shortly after his first meeting with Miss Killick, sensations novel and puzzling, and one result of which was to inspire him with a wish to please, and an uneasiness as to his outward man, that he had never previously exhibited. Darrell smiled as he noticed the change in his old tutor. Mr. Meanwell had become, of a sudden, sensitive about the tie of his cravat and the fit of his coat, thrust his great hands into the unaccustomed bondage of gloves, and became anxious about the ironing of his shirt collar and the blackening of his boots.

The task of again taking charge of Darrell's education was to the new vicar of Gridley Green a congenial one, and the boy's studies were, as had been agreed upon, resumed. The parsonage was within an easy walk of Crag Towers, and there were but few days on which, beneath the shade of the great pear tree on the lawn, or in the

study, an apartment which surely should have retained some savour of the thousand and odd sermons that had been composed within its panelled walls, Mr. Meanwell did not conduct his apt pupil to fresh fields and pastures new. A brighter or a more diligent learner than Darrell Conyers has rarely been seen. It would have been easy for him, as first favourite with his grandfather, and Crown Prince, so to speak, of the splendid Conyers property, to have shirked his lessons. But had his procuring a writer's place at Somerset House, on the meagre pay of which preferment to live, depended on his industry, the young heir could hardly have been more assiduous in his studies. Yet when teacher and pupil met, it was the latter, and not the former, who selected the fresh fields and new pastures whereon the intellect should be turned out to graze. "Never mind our old classical friends," Darrell would say, in the bold, almost authoritative tone that adapted itself so well to his firm, clear-cut lips, "I could cap

verses, thanks to you, with the best of old-fashioned Etonians ; while, as to Aristophanes, I could fancy myself to have had a season ticket in the old Athenian theatre. The number of men who care for Latin and Greek dwindles daily. Let us hammer at Goethe, since German is the modish tongue, and then, if you please, get on with the new books you have ordered, at my wish, from London. A fellow in my position should be posted up, you know."

Some spell, stronger than Sir Peregrine's salary, or gratitude for Sir Peregrine's presentation to Gridley Green, seemed to make his former instructor submissive to his pupil's will. Mr. Meanwell was one of those men, living mines of erudition, who only need a per centage of the worldly tact so common to those who are in all respects their inferiors, to shine forth among those whom the public delights to honour. Contemporaries of his were University professors on the strength of the Greek and the Hebrew, the history and the mathematics,

grandson now chose to glean from his instructor's lessons. He had the knack of rapid study, pouncing, as it were, upon the kernel of fact, and allowing the husk of diction to float away whither it listed.

"It cost me months," said the new Vicar of Gridley one day, as he pushed aside his books, "to reach the point that you have gained and passed in less than a fortnight. And yet I worked, and hard too. I could wish, dear boy, that we were back again at the old place, content with plain fare and rustic fashions, and labouring through our daily task as cheerily as we did before the idea of this great fortune and this high position had——"

"Hush!" said Darrell quickly, and with every feature in his fair face hardening at once, "never, though we are alone, forget that the past should be buried, since it is dead and forgotten. There are things that should be drowned in Lethe, as our toga-wearing friends," glancing as he spoke at the well-thumbed, calf-bound volumes on

the bookshelves, "would have said, and—why, man, you are not going to faint again, surely, that you turn to the colour of new bleached linen, in that preposterous way?"

"It is nothing—nothing," returned the tutor with a sickly smile, as he walked to the open window and gasped for air, "I must school myself to be more of the Stoic than I have yet become. A better model than you, with your cool courage, present for imitation, I could not well have before my eyes."

"Ay, they call me Daredevil Darrell down here," answered the boy, with recovered good-humour, and apparently unconscious of the bitter tone in which his instructor's last words had been uttered. "Come, sir, we are wasting time. Let us see if we can screw a new meaning out of the allegory, Faust. He was a student like you, dear friend, and you should have a fellow-feeling for the fiend-ridden German dreamer."

"Ay, and he sold his soul for a sorry price, but yet got the purchase-money," retorted Meanwell, with unusual heat of manner.

"Mephistopheles has grown more cunning now and buys us for nothing. We——" But here he came to a dead stop, as his own wavering eyes met Darrell's steady glance, and quailed before it.

"We may as well leave off æsthetic talk, and begin the lesson," said the boy quietly, and Mr. Meanwell passed his hand over his aching brow, and with a groan resumed his seat and opened the book before him.

The German lesson went steadily on without further interruptions. A fanciful likeness might have been traced between its subject-matter and the learner and teacher who were engaged upon it. Of a surety no theatrical manager would have cast Mr. Meanwell for the part of Faust, or have selected Darrell for that of Mephistopheles. Neither, in stage phrase, looked the character. And yet the tutor, large brained, but weak of will, might have offered some points of resemblance with Goethe's hero, a man of thought, and doubt, and reverie, a man certain to receive from the

world less than his due meed of honour, because incapable of revealing the treasures of mental wealth that lay within. On the other hand, the pupil, in the keen concentration of his faculties on one especial point, in the clear, intuitive appreciation of the motive of those around him, betrayed some of the qualities of the demon-tempter whose beckoning finger drew his irresolute human companion along the road to ruin. A wild idea would such a comparison have seemed had it been broached in a mixed company. Where were the diabolical leer, the black eyebrows, the fiendish smile, of Faust's familiar? In years Darrell was a child, and in face almost an angel. But it is a bad sign when one so young speaks of what still, trumpet-like, stirs the mass of mankind to a generous enthusiasm of honour, patriotism, faith, unselfish devotion, only with a light laugh or a careless sneer. It was a notable fact that during Mr. Meanwell's lessons—often rather lectures fit to be addressed to a class than the dry grind that we remember

in our own school days—Darrell seemed to learn all things and to scorn them all. His grasp of a truth, his vivid appreciation of poetry or pathos, these were as remarkable in their way as his untiring industry, and often stimulated the teacher's flagging zeal to surpass itself in the eager imparting of the lore so laboriously acquired. But when the day's work was over, and the books closed, the Reverend Mark often felt a strange pain as some of Darrell's random sayings rankled, like poisoned arrows, in his mind, and was half disposed to ponder whether mankind might not be divided into the two categories of dupes in blinkers, saddled and bridled, and of the unscrupulous knaves who come into the world, booted and spurred, to ride them.

"What are your plans to-day?" asked Darrell, when the teaching for that morning had come to a close, and the boy stood beside the open window, one glove drawn on, and tapping with the butt-end of his gold-mounted riding-whip the tough stem

of the old vine that was nailed to the mouldering brickwork. "But I conclude that your time is tolerably well filled up, mortgaged as it probably is to some of the amiable fanatics who take it in ill part if the parson declines to see through their spectacles. Or perhaps you are going to the commodore's Cottage?"

"Yes—that is, I promised Captain Killick that I would call——" stammered the tutor, wincing and reddening under the bold bright eyes of his pupil.

"Quite right and neighbourly," rejoined Darrell, as he made a quick imperative sign to the gardener-lad who was leading Sprite to and fro before the house. "You do well to cultivate so pleasant an acquaintance. If you start soon you will find Miss Grace at home, as well as her uncle. As for me, I shall make the best of my way across country; they have a large company staying at Sunnylees—at the marquis's, you know—and I promised Fitzharry and the Neville lads to ride over and give one of

their young visitors—a fellow in a crack cavalry regiment—a lesson at billiards. He thinks himself a peerless hand at pyramids, and they have set their hearts on seeing his mortified face when he finds himself worsted by a boy like me.”

“It was wholesomer ; ay, and better far,” said Mr. Meanwell with a sigh, “before you had learned to consort with lordlings, or to pit yourself against Lancers and Hussars at games of skill. Alas ! you were always only too quick in picking up every idle accomplishment. You had natural gifts, bounteously bestowed, which only needed to be worthily employed to have won the approval of the good and of the great. I once hoped that I might have followed, from afar off, your triumphs at the University, proud of a pupil who——”

“Who would have snapped up an open scholarship, and, perhaps, won a prize or two,” interposed Darrell, with a yawn of careless unconcern. “Is it not pleasanter, after all, to wear a velvet cap and be free

of the Common Room, and flutter through the learned groves of Academe like the butterfly that I am, with wings, thanks to the beneficent law of entail, plentifully besprinkled with gold-dust. I'm not lazy by instinct or by habit, but what would have been a laudable ambition in an obscure freshman would ill suit with the acknowledged station of Sir Peregrine's heir. And I am not sure that I shall go to college. Diplomacy tempts me more, but then my grandfather would not relish my being so far off as Vienna or Athens. And, just now, the rolling ivory and the tough cue signify more than sound Latinity and tinkling iambics. No, no, dear sir, we cannot, if we would, put back the clock of time and become our old selves of a year or so since. And the clock reminds me of the commodore, who would, in theory, administer six dozen lashes with the 'thief's' formidable cat-o'-nine-tails—nine knots in every tail—to any one less tried and trusted than the old housekeeper, who

should tamper with it to the extent of setting it right. You will not find Miss Grace, unless you are quick in putting on your hat. And that would be a pity, for the sake of the parish." And with a nod and an arch glance Darrell swaggered out, his spurs clinking as he crossed the stone floor of the square entrance-hall, and scarcely touching the stirrup, sprang into the saddle. Black Sprite reared and swerved, and then, after a bound or two, the fiery brute seemed to recognize the hopelessness of unseating the young Centaur on his back, and went meekly enough out of the garden gate. The boy looked laughingly back and waved his hand in sign of adieu to the tutor, who looked after him so long as he could catch a glimpse of the proud, fair head, the sunshine glinting on the golden curls, and then dropped into a chair, and hid his face between his hands.

"I wish that I had never come here—that I had never seen this place;" such were his broken words of self-reproach.

"There are none who address me, but I fear that they should read in my face what I cannot hide. I tremble as I discharge my allotted duties in the solemn ceremonies of our Church. With what a heart can I—I—dole out consolation at the bedside of a repentant sinner, cheer the sad decline of the aged poor, whose bleared eyes, weary of the things of earth, rest on the far-off gleam from the Heavenly City where there shall be no more pain, no more care, where sorrow is not! Yet am I so utterly vile, after all, that with an honest wish to be of use to those around me, I feel as though I were but a scapegoat to be driven away into the wilderness. What have I done?" And he passed his hand through his hair and gazed, with bewildered eyes, round the room, as if to question the inanimate objects about him as to the cause of his mental disquiet. "Why do I wince beneath the gnawing tooth of self-reproach? It is that I have been so weak, miserably, fatally weak. And that is the one fault for which nothing can atone."

Mr. Meanwell, though hazy in his ethics, was, perhaps, not far wrong in his conclusion. To drift, like a straw upon the tide, into what is wrong, be the sin never so negative or venial, to be the tool and slave of a mightier will, this is to be base indeed. The new Vicar of Gridley Green was hardly to be envied the glebe and the stipend, the parsonage and the salary, for the receipt of which many a hardworking curate deemed him the luckiest of men.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CONSULTATION.

"INDEED, Grace, dear, I think you are tormenting yourself to no purpose. The man is good—we women always know that somehow, and I had not been ten minutes in Mr. Meanwell's company before I felt assured that he was one to esteem—and that he is completely devoted to you a child might see. If he does not speak, or if he talks riddles, depend upon it that this is only because of his—modesty."

Nellie Conyers had been on the point of using the word "awkwardness," but had modified the expression for fear of wounding her friend's ear. And that friend, as may be easily conjectured, was the commodore's niece, Grace Killick. The two

were in high council, such a consultation as girls have held with one another in every language, since the days of Ovid's Noble Savage, and in which the conversation has commonly had a tendency towards one subject, without which this world of ours would be but a fossil planet. Grace, whose mind was troubled, had naturally sought her intimate ally at the Castle, and had poured her confidences, as regarded the new vicar, into the sympathetic ear of Sir Peregrine's youngest daughter. And Nellie, whose heart was soft, and whose own love-history rendered her all alive to whatever touched on the theme of troth-plight and marriage, did her best to cheer the spirit of her friend.

"I'm afraid," said Grace, shaking her head, "that there is more than you fancy, Nellie, in Mr. Meanwell's reticence. If he were only shy, and—and stammering, you know, in that funny way he had when we were first acquainted; he had been shut up, poor fellow, blinding himself over

odious musty books, and so could not do himself justice—I should, as you do, set his backwardness down to real bashful inability to speak. And then—who knows—I might care less about it, because—well, I suppose one can't bear to have any ludicrous association of ideas with a man one—cares for.”

“Of course not,” replied Nellie cordially. In her own case, this stumbling-block had not obtruded itself. Captain Craven Conyers was no object of ridicule. But she quickly remembered that the Reverend Mark was of another stamp, and added: “I am sure the more one knows and sees of Mr. Meanwell, the less one feels inclined to smile at the slight oddities of manner which struck upon us all at the first. The poor praise him with one voice. His popularity in the parish grows, and very justly, every day. Papa took up his cause the other day, and said, in answer to some careless jest of Sir Hugh Neville's, that of all the presentations he had ever

made to the five livings in his gift, this was the best. He spares no pains with Darrell's education, and——”

“But that is precisely what I cannot comprehend,” interrupted Grace eagerly. “That he should do his duty by your bright young nephew, or that he should be proud of such a pupil, I can easily believe. But why is he afraid of his pupil? I have seen him watch Darrell's eye as a dog looks up to that of his master. Much as I liked the boy from the first—we all did—I could almost hate him as I see how much less of a man Mark—Mr. Meanwell, I should say—becomes when he is present.”

“It is not dear Darrell's fault,” replied Nellie the peacemaker; “you must recollect, Grace, love, that he has a very strong will and a high spirit, and we have all, I fear, done our best to spoil him amongst us. Yet he isn't spoiled. Who ever heard him say an unkind word? He has sometimes a wild, rattling fashion of talking, which puzzles me, I know, and perhaps

his old tutor too, but that springs from mere youthful mirth and merriment."

"I'll tell you a secret, Nellie," returned Grace slowly. "Will you laugh at me if I tell you that Darrell—this beautiful boy of whom you are all so naturally proud, being wise, witty, brave; such a child as is not to be met with, I dare say, twice in a lifetime—frightens me now and then, as though he were one of the fairy elf changelings whom, when I was a child myself, I have read of—not a creature of mortal mould at all? Don't be offended at what I say."

"I'll promise not to be offended," answered Nellie stoutly; "and, indeed, Darrell is quite able to fight his own battles, and would scarcely like to be championed by poor little me, whom he rather patronizes than otherwise. But why he should alarm you, I cannot conceive. I was a little inclined at first to apprehend that his own utter fearlessness should lead him into danger, but now I am growing

to share the half-superstitious belief of the servants and villagers in what they call the young master's luck. Perhaps Mr. Meanwell does not quite fathom his pupil's character."

"If he does," said Grace with a smile, "he must have greater skill as a diviner than I give him credit for. I feel, sometimes, as though it were we who were the children, and the boy the one strong-brained, steel-nerved member of the company. But never mind that; very likely, in years to come, when we are quiet matronly personages, Darrell's face, and Darrell's winning ways, will cause many a heartache, and many a discussion among the young ladies now in the school-room. But what I cannot account for is the low estimate which Mr. Meanwell takes of himself—the self-depreciatory, and, at times, bitter manner in which he replies to deserved compliments on the admirable zeal that he displays in his parish—the dark, broken words that he mutters now and then between his teeth, as though——"

"As though what?" suggested Nellie, finding that Grace hesitated to conclude her sentence.

"As though," said Miss Killick, thus pressed, "there were some reason why he felt himself unworthy to be vicar of this place, unworthy to ask—anybody for whom he might care—to be his wife; as if he were tempted to throw up his preferment and leave England for ever. I have pieced together little scraps of his speech, and eked them out by the remembrance of looks and changes of colour, until I have constructed, from my own fancy, a Monster worse than that of Frankenstein. You don't believe, do you, Nellie," she asked sobbing, as she hid her head on her friend's shoulder, "that Mark can have done anything amiss—about money, perhaps, long ago—and that Darrell knows the story? If so, I'm sure he was tricked into doing it, but—it would be dreadful, would it not?"

Nellie imparted all the consolation, by

caresses and soothing words, that it was in her power to give. She pointed out with sufficient cogency the extreme unlikelihood of such a hypothesis, showing that the Reverend Mark not only bore a very high character for honour and integrity, but was a frugal, self-denying man, of few wants and sensitive feelings, charitable to the needy, but without, so far as was known, one expensive taste or habit. He had never been mixed up with those commercial or stock-jobbing speculations, in which some clergymen burn their fingers or besmirch their reputation, and his blameless life had been spent in teaching, with occasional spells of parochial duty. It was possible that he might be more or less under the influence of wild or extreme theological tenets—of which, however, his sermons betrayed no trace — and might hold, or half hold, a fanciful belief that it would be sinful to retain his comfortable living, or to add to his comforts by marrying; and this, of course, would be a delusion

much to be deplored, but perhaps not unconquerable. As for his apparent deference to Darrell, and the nervous anxiety which his bearing indicated whenever the boy's opinion was in question, this was no doubt a mere instance of the power which a temperament like that of the young heir could exercise over one like that of Mr. Meanwell.

"They are relations, you know, too, although we all tacitly agree to forget that Darrell's mother bore the name of Meanwell," said Nellie laughing; "and it is not very surprising that his nephew and his charge should appear a vastly important personage in Mr. Meanwell's eyes, considering that he must one day be master here. But rely on it, Grace, my dear, that the honest man really does love you from the bottom of his heart, and rely on it too, that he will speak, and to the purpose, before the summer is quite over."

But the seasons went on with their steady course, and Nellie's good-natured

prediction was unfulfilled. The crops of waving corn, the tender green of which had clothed the hill sides when first the tutor had brought his pupil to the shelter of the stately roof beneath which his ancestors had dwelt, were transmuted by Nature's own alchemy into a sea of billowy gold, and fell beneath the sickle. The woodlands put on the russet and tawny and brown livery of sober autumn. The heather changed from soft purple to dusky red. The leaves came whirling down at every gust of the moist wind that shook the boughs to which they clung. Yet Mr. Meanwell did not, in set terms, declare his love for Grace Killick. But these speechless attachments are by no means uncommon in country places, where the wheels of Time move so noiselessly, and with so little jarring or friction, as to make change comparatively difficult. As it was, the vicar's affection for the commodore's niece was known or surmised by scores of families whose members Mr. Meanwell would never, in his

innocence, have suspected of interesting themselves in his affairs. Grace's uncle, whose powers of perception were superior to those of Sir Peregrine his neighbour, had long since guessed the reason of the Reverend Mark's assiduity in visiting at the Cottage, nor need that gentleman have feared for the reception which would await him from the commodore had he boldly presented himself as a suitor for Miss Killick's hand.

"It would not take the girl out of the parish!"—such was his confidential remark to one of his oldest friends—"and that's well, for I am too old to weigh anchor and seek a new home, while yet I could not bear to lose sight of her. And if Grace can forgive the poor fellow his lubberly ways—a better man, mind you, never stepped, or my name is not Tom Killick—why should I object?"

But still somehow the time slipped away, and left Mr. Meanwell as it found him, silent on the subject of a distinct proposal of marriage.

Darrell's popularity showed no signs of waning. Even Adeline, his kindred enemy, had prudently given up the useless attempt to discredit one whom the general voice applauded on so many grounds, and rarely intimated her dislike to the favourite save by a cold look or an impassive bearing. It was a peculiarity of the boy that no pettiness of disposition, no trivial weakness or fault, such as the young and over-indulged so often exhibit, seemed to mar the genial brightness of his sunny nature. His very talk, though often fraught with a suppressed or covert meaning too subtle for his auditors, was never pretentious, and rarely, save in conversation with his luckless tutor, cynical and mocking. The young men visiting at the great country mansions round about, between the owners of which and the family at Crag Towers there was now frequent intercourse, treated him as an equal, and often remembered with half-incredulous and half-amused surprise, how young he was. And this, at an age so

jealous and self-conscious as are the years that immediately precede and succeed the termination of legal infancy, was no light compliment.

"Fitzharry is a cub; as for those Neville boys, they make me as sick by their absurd aping of men's habits as they do themselves with that strong Cavendish that they will smoke;" such was the verdict of the moustached foreman of a billiard-room jury, in one of these country houses hard by; "but Darrell, hang it—I can't believe he's the youngster they make him out, or if so, he might challenge all England to match him, weight for age."

One object of wonder to the young heir's new acquaintances, and also, it must be owned, to his own family, was the lavish supply of money in the boy's possession, and the freehanded fashion in which he employed it. On this head a double error in the way of belief was current, Sir Peregrine imagining that the ultra liberality of Adeline and Nellie, each of whom had a

small income by way of pin money, was the source of his grandson's wealth; while his daughters were equally convinced that the old baronet's doting fondness for Darrell had induced him to permit the boy a command of ready cash extraordinary at his years. But nothing was said on either side to elucidate this mystery, nor did it enter into the head of any one to connect Darrell's abundant store of sovereigns with the sum of money which Mr. Meanwell had paid over to him on the occasion of their memorable interview beneath the Pulpit Rock. And thus the summer wore itself away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE START FOR PARIS.

THE last red embers of the fading summer had burned themselves out months ago. The crops had been cut and garnered, the last aftermath swept away before the trenchant scythe. There were bare, bald trees in plenty among the woods and hedgerows, while the few that retained a modicum of their ancient honours made but a melancholy show of dull crimson or of tan-tinted brown. The year had clad itself in sad-coloured apparel, as though wearing premature mourning for its own decease and burial. Only the golden gorse, only the gloomy firs, seemed to defy time. And yet the rich, mellow autumn, in the fulness of its fruition of the summer's smiling promise,

had been sufficiently pleasant, at least at Crag Towers and the cheery country side adjacent. There had been brisk file-firing among the crisp stubbles, as though skirmishers were falling back upon the support of the advancing columns in their rear, and at a later date there had been havoc made, in copse and brake, among the barley-fed pheasants. Then had come the flashing of scarlet among the downs and meadows, and the wild music of the hounds, and the crash and thunder of horses' feet as the hunt swept by. The thorny rose-brambles in the hedges were decked out with red oblong beads—the "hips and haws," from the abundance of which weather-prophets predict a long and hard winter—the wedge-shaped flocks of wild fowl went sailing by southward; the hoar-frost clung in shady places to the long rank grass, and all signs and tokens proved that the year's pleasant youth and vigorous maturity were over, and that age and decrepitude and death were near at hand.

“I wish I were going too” had been the substance of what fell from many feminine lips, when the subject of the approaching visit of the Conyers family to the fair French metropolis was under discussion. For Paris is to womankind what Sindbad’s monstrous loadstone was to the iron nails of unlucky ships—a magnet which it is hard to resist. Sir Peregrine, on the other hand, felt more than one twinge of regret at the precipitant fashion in which he had accepted his sister-in-law’s invitation. Paris was no more to him than it is to the majority of elderly, eminently respectable, and well-to-do Englishmen. He had for many years possessed a superficial acquaintance with the beautiful, brilliant, wicked city on the Seine, and was privately disposed to think its beauty, brilliance, and perhaps wickedness, considerably over-rated by the simple imaginations of provincials and foreigners. But Darrell was to be one of the party, and that he should see Paris thus early would be well. Every gentleman, Sir Peregrine

thought, must see Paris, precisely as young Hopeful, a hundred or two hundred years ago, was destined while in his cradle to the grand tour. That standard circuit of travel has been prodigiously extended since postillions, passports, and mounted couriers became things of the past; but all roads lead to Lutetia, as formerly to Rome. It would be better that the future Sir Darrell Conyers should learn something of the modern Capua while yet a boy, and under such sound mentorship as that of his grandfather.

But Nellie's face was dressed in smiles when finally the carriage rolled away from the Castle, and the horses' heads were set towards the railway station. It was not that she expected to meet Craven yonder. The captain, by gracious permission of "My Lords," was at sea. But then her aunt, that Anglo-Parisian leader of fashion, of whom she had always been a little afraid, was *his* mother. Her abode was, presumably, his home. And that fact of

Craven's being son to their trans-channel entertainer lent a charm to the visit. Adeline, of all those present, seemed the most to enjoy the anticipation of the pleasure to come. But she alone, perhaps, was fully aware how very near to being nipped in the bud their agreeable project had been. For Sir Peregrine was, in popular phraseology, bad to move. In an unusually urbane mood he had been tempted into accepting the offers of his expatriated sister-in-law, but this compliance had cost him many a secret pang and many a fit of brooding melancholy. For some weeks the journey to Paris had seemed as though it were one of those inchoate plans which go down to the limbo of failures. Repeatedly Sir Peregrine had taken up his pen to indite a letter of stately excuses for non-compliance with his relative's kind request, and somehow the apology had never been framed or forwarded.

One advantage which the small-brained of our species possess is that they are rarely

irresolute. To shallow foreheads and contracted crania, the traditional "three courses" do not suggest themselves. But the poor thinker, stumbling through the twilight, and keenly alive to the existence of dimly seen obstacles that ironwitted fools reckon nothing of, is indeed a spectacle for gods and men to pity. Now, no fair dealing Court of Opinion would have pronounced Sir Peregrine Conyers to be the intellectual equal of the Reverend Mark Meanwell. The tutor had thoughts uncounted, brighter, subtler, nobler, than ever entered into the baronet's mind. But both men were lamentably undecided, although the lord of Crag Towers piqued himself on the inflexible steadiness of his will. He had wavered very much, as the time for the trip to Paris drew near, on the subject of starting for that city, and only his affection for Darrell and Adeline's robust will had kept him faithful to his engagement. That famous garden party at the Towers had produced the customary return in the shape of a

harvest of entertainments, to which the Conyers family had been invited. But Sir Peregrine, although willing that his daughters and his grandson should avail themselves of the hospitality of the county dignitaries, was not to be coaxed from the retirement in which, since the final estrangement from his son, he had secluded himself. He would not dine with Sir Harry, although he consented to "look in" for half an hour at the flower show at Sir Hugh's, and spend another segment of his time at Sunnylees, when four hundred horsemen mustered to hail royalty at the lawn meet of the hounds.

Once or twice it had seemed certain that the baronet would never tear himself away from his home. He was one of those men whose strong local attachments are almost cat-like; and Crag Towers and his own identity seemed indissolubly kind to one another. A thousand invisible chains of habit combined to bind him to the place. Then, too, the grief, morbidly cherished,

for his lost son, his lost heir, heightened his reluctance to be dragged once more from his retreat into the fashionable whirlpool of a frivolous society. Even at the last, the carriage waited long before the door ere Sir Peregrine, with slow steps and compressed lips, came forth to take his place with the rest of the party, and then, and not till then, did Adeline feel the perfect assurance that the delayed journey to Paris would at length become an accomplished fact.

"It was a toss-up whether the governor stayed or went," Sir Peregrine's own man said afterwards, in confidence to the big footman who had been "told off" for foreign service, and large-limbed Thomas assented as he sipped his beer for the last time on English ground. Nellie, whose sweet nature acted on her father's morose spirit as David's harp on Saul in his dark hour, received him with a smile. But a very close observer might have noted in Darrell's handsome face some slight signs

of a disdainful indifference. The symptoms that indicated weakness of purpose met with scanty sympathy on the part of the young heir.

The commodore and his niece had crossed the park to bid their friends good-bye. So had Mr. Meanwell. The latter stood almost unnoticed in the background, and but for Darrell, who was uniformly considerate towards his tutor when before the world, might have been forgotten in the last exchange of amicable adieux. The servants crowded into the hall or peeped discreetly from upper windows. Sir Peregrine's temporary divorce from his ancestral abode was an event in the eyes of other people than himself. It was with a distinct effort that the old man took his seat in the carriage. "Tell Peters to drive fast," was his brief order as his own attendant closed the door; and then there was a quick shaking of hands and waving of handkerchiefs and a hurried word or two, and the carriage dashed off at a rapid pace. Peters and the

satin-skinned horses that he drove had but a short allowance of time in which to accomplish the distance between Crag Towers and the railway station, thanks to their master's reluctant slowness when the actual wrench of the departure became necessary. Thud, thud went the hurrying hoofs, and the wheels went flashing along the smooth road. Luckily, as the valet observed, the bulk of the luggage, with the carriage that was to accompany the travellers to Paris, had been sent forward at an earlier hour, or else there would have been risk of losing the train, and with the train the tidal steamer that was to carry the party over to the French coast.

We have by this time succeeded in stripping travel of nine-tenths of the hardships and perils which once lent it a zest. Even a mail-coach journey had a picturesque uncertainty about it which no railway, albeit the "butcher's bill" of the killed and wounded may be heavy, can emulate. To stick in a snow-drift, to be

upset into brook or hedge, or to share the risk and the excitement of a furious race downhill between two opposition coaches, these were quite practicable amenities of the road long after the last highwayman had been hanged at Debtor's Door. The cheery landlady, the buxom barmaid, of the wayside White Hart hostelry, really did contrive to manifest a personal interest and a hospitable concern as to the comfort of the half-frozen passengers, that has nothing in common with the mechanical reception of hungry voyagers by the lofty-chignoned young persons who await custom behind the refreshment bar at Mugby Junction. But what must have been the emotions which a journey on horseback, say for a hundred and fifty or two hundred miles, as between London and York or Exeter, called forth? The mounted traveller was more sensitive to the caprices of the weather than we, with our foot-warmers, rugs, and padded compartments, can readily conceive. Rain and mire made

his transit a penance. Floods or snow rendered him a prisoner in some country inn. In fine summer weather a skilled and prudent rider, such as Dugdale the herald, could on a thoroughly seasoned hackney get through his forty or fifty miles between sunrise and dark. At this rate, a well-mounted horseman, content to be in the saddle at daybreak, and to amble along the rough roads, and bait his sturdy nag thrice daily, might hope to reach the north or west before the week was out, even with an occasional thunderstorm or fog to arrest his progress. But then there were other than meteorological impediments. Yonder fellow in the green coat, slashed with silver, who is cantering his fleet mare across the furzy common, has a "stand and deliver" air about him. The stout gentleman on the bay roadster, who uttered a gruff "good eve," as he brushed by, was well equipped with sword and pistols, and may possibly be again encountered on the lonely stretch of moorland yet to be traversed. The

bushes that shake in that gully of evil repute may as well quiver at the touch of lurking footpads as at a passing gust of wind.

Our present locomotion is of a sort to lend little stimulus to the fancy. As the train rushes along the iron way, no one save a few nervous old ladies, and perhaps the careworn engine-driver, who appreciates the full value of encouraging signals and observance of bye-laws, dreams of a collision. The fast-receding prospect palls upon the jaded eye. Swift as is the flight from town to town, the progress is apt to appear dull and unsatisfactory to those who have learned to look upon a journey as merely so many hours cut out of the traveller's existence, a tax of time levied on those who range the world. And if black Care sits, or sat, as Horace told us, behind the horseman, it is easier still for that dismal attendant to claim accommodation on the cushions of a railway carriage. Sir Peregrine felt this, as steam and iron

whirled him as on eagle wings away from his home. Every mile of added distance that separated him from Crag Towers, seemed to have the effect of rendering him more and more gloomy and silent. There, in Wyeside, where every one knew him, and his history, it was possible for him to nurse his carking grief in peace, and to follow habits of his own choosing. In London, where sorrow is a bore to the crowd that pursue pleasure or ambition, he never willingly lingered, being reluctant to outrage society by musing over his domestic woes. Still less was his temperament attuned to the key-note of that joyous capital where misfortune is ignored, and melancholy outlawed; where bereaved survivors, belonging to the choicest circles, mourn in white, like the Chinese; and where a long face and a quiet tongue are reckoned the unpardonable sins.

The baronet's was not a healthy mind. Idleness, pride, and prejudice had united to encrust it with a jealous and resentful

gloom, while disappointed hopes had left behind them a legacy of vain regrets and unacknowledged penitence. For the bitterness of these he had to thank the station that was as the apple of his eye, exempting him as it did from the common cares that beset nineteen-twentieths of our fellow-creatures, merely to give an artificial prominence to such grievances as might be his especial lot. Indolent people often wonder at the apparent callousness which enables the poor and lowly to go through the daily round of labour when death has been busy at the hearth, and there is a dear face missing from the home group. They little know how merciful a consoler, in such a case, is that necessity for work, that imperious call to arms, as it were, against the wolf of hunger, which dulls the edge of sorrow and braces the mind for wholesome exertion.

It has been noted by students of that perplexing lore which we call human nature, that near relations who are very

much alike often have the least possible amount of sympathy with one another. Thus Adeline and her father appeared, like two parallel lines, never to meet. Miss Conyers had griefs of her own, baffled hopes, sad memories, which should have disposed her heart to tenderness, yet she merely looked on the baronet's melancholy moods as a vexatious peculiarity of temper, rather deserving of blame than compassion. Her gentle sister, on the other hand, pitied, without perhaps fully realizing, the unhappiness which had become a part of Sir Peregrine's nature. It was very different with the boy who was the fourth member of the family party. It seemed as though neither selfish nor unselfish grief could make an impression on that brilliant, half-careless nature, formed for pleasure and for success. His own bearing towards his grandfather had always been kind and respectful, yet frank and fearless, and such as it had been from the first, it still continued to be. Some had fancied, and Adeline had

been of the number, that the spoiled strip-ling would forfeit the old man's goodwill by presuming on his indulgence. But such was not the case. If the young heir had had for a primer Machiavelli's *Advice to a Prince*, he could scarcely have acted better for his own interests than he had done. His bright, bold eyes, in which might have been traced some fanciful resemblance to that of the falcon that was the ancient cognizance of the warlike race from which he sprang, never once softened as he watched the shade on Sir Peregrine's brow or the careworn lines about the mouth. To give pity, or to crave for it, would have seemed strange to Darrell Conyers.

Thus the train sped on its way eastward, past apple orchards and rippling mill streams, past thatched hamlets and sleepy towns, past stone quarries and canals, whereon brown-sailed barges slowly floated before a favourable breeze, past swelling downs and osier-cradled river, and thus towards London and the sea. The travel-

lers, counting only those whose last night had been spent at Crag Towers, had a sufficient diversity as to their sentiments, could any physiological Asmodeus have unroofed their skulls to read the thoughts that flitted through each busy brain. Some insight has been already afforded, so far as those of the Conyers family were concerned. But then they took with them five servants, each of whom, to his or herself, was a living microcosm, concentrating the interest that the larger world can boast. Sir Peregrine's valet was equal to either fortune. A long life spent in confidential service had given him some twenty experiences of Paris, with foolish young masters, with silly old masters, with masters who were not young or old, not foolish or silly; but never without, as the gentleman's gentleman feelingly remarked, being "a trifle the better for it" in the region of the pocket. Astute old servants know pretty well that a journey, costly to those who pay, is often a golden windfall to the re-

ceivers of perquisites and the snappers-up of pickings. But the coachman, who was brushing up his rusty recollections of the city through the stately streets of which he had driven his high-stepping horses more than once, and who employed strong expletives against himself when he could not remember whether the "Roo" de this ran into the "Roo" de that, or *vice versâ*, consigned the expedition to regions hotter than West Africa, as he talked the matter over with the sympathetic groom. The beer, he condescended to say, though dear, wasn't bad, when you drank it at a good house, and there was a liveliness about the town that pleased you at first. But—and it seemed a portentous demurrer which that "but" represented—an English coachman, Peters was sorry to say, generally came away from Paris poorer than he went. "Such a set of rascally robbers as prowled about the caffys, always tempting a fellow to take a hand at écarty, or getting up sweepstakes for the Homnium,

or offering a 'tip' on the Chantilly Grand Prize," in the opinion of Mr. Peters, no London betting-house could match. As for the French, *as* French, they might be well enough, but the whole migration, to his mind, was a blunder.

Miss Tucker, Adeline's maid, was very reserved as to her own private sentiments as regarded the journey. The Miss Tuckers of aristocratic service commonly find it convenient to be discreet as to their own wishes and those of their mistresses. Indeed if there be a Sphynx in modern life it is a practised and well-drilled lady's maid. Miss Tucker—Miss, in all courteous deference, to the big melancholy footman told off for foreign service, but plain Tucker in official parlance—had been abroad before, and rather liked it. So had the big melancholy footman, and he didn't like it. He sat beside the trim Abigail, and stared impartially out of the window of his second-class carriage at pasture and arable, suburban villa or factory. So had he stared

when travelling with Lord and Lady Deptford, after my lord's collapse on the turf in Moonbeam's year, at some of the loveliest prospects in Europe, at Rhenish cliffs and Tyrol gorges, at Alpine glaciers and Italian castled villages, perched like eyries on a rocky height, and at Swiss lakes, as blue and bright as giant sapphires framed in sable pine trees and silvery snows. The footman took travel, as he took the burnishing of plate, as an incident of service, a part of his duty, and one with which he would have been exceedingly thankful to dispense.

So they sped on, each with a plan, each with hopes, regrets, aspirations, in which the others had no share. Man is a gregarious animal, and we have, certainly, much in common. But it is strange, also, to gauge the distance, morally speaking, that may divide from one another the members of an average household. Some of them, although they may share the same meal, have ostensibly identical interests,

and join in the same conversation, are in soul as far apart as are the fixed stars.

So they journeyed on, and when black night fell, and the wan moonlight peeped through drifting clouds, were well at sea, hurrying on as fast as the panting engines could force the boat along, from the white cliffs of England to the line of rolling sandhills opposite. Strange, that a poor seven leagues of stormy water should prove so efficient a barrier between Continental Europe, and the great island that has for eight hundred years played the part, in the complicated machine of international politics, which the whirling "governor" enacts to a steam engine; strange, that beyond that silver strip of chopping, fretful waves, there should exist a national character, and national institutions, which a land frontier would have failed to protect, and which offer the one fresh element to the chafed disputants on the sunnier side of the Channel!

Such thoughts as these were probably

absent from the young, though busy brain of Darrell Conyers, as he ranged the deck, during the short hours of the trip from shore to shore, treading the heaving planks with as light and firm a foot as if the ground swell had not been heavy, though the wind was lulled to rest. There were plenty of passengers—there always are—who were plunged in the depths of degrading misery by the motion of the vessel, and among these groaning sufferers was more than one strong man, who envied the immunity from sea-sickness which the handsome lad possessed, as of right.

“I suppose the voyage from India made me proof against that kind of thing!” had been Darrell’s laughing rejoinder to his grandfather’s half-envious expression of surprise at the boy’s indifference to the tyranny of Neptune, whose bond slave Sir Peregrine had never ceased to be. “It seems to me that Cousin Craven’s profession would not be a bad one. Some of the sailors up above there—I must go and chat

again with them—were saying that they thought I should be fit for it.”

And this was quite true. It was Darrell's way to win the goodwill of those whom he met. A more unlikely place than the deck of a Channel packet in which a strong individuality should make itself be felt, could hardly be selected; and yet steward and gruff, frosty-whiskered steersman, and burly A. B.'s., and even the red-nosed old commander, in his gold-laced cap, agreed that it was a sin and a shame, that a boy like yonder youngster should lead a landsman's life, when he was cut out, stock and block, for a good sailor. And then came the landing, and the rush ashore.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE RUE DE LA VIEILLE ROCHE.

AMONG the oldest inhabitants, British born, of Paris, Mrs. Craven Conyers filled a conspicuous place. She had there fixed her Lares and Penates in those good old times chronicled by Washington Irving and the late Mr. Raikes, and chucklingly remembered by many a superannuated paterfamilias, when the French capital was a very paradise of economical enjoyment. The highly taxed Briton of that period found with delight that his modest income would procure luxuries in lieu of comforts, if spent beside the Seine. Those halcyon days, when the expenditure of a brace of annual thousands entitled the expatriated Englishman to be dubbed "milor," by his

admiring tradesfolk, are for ever fled. To all intents and purposes, Paris, to the foreigner, is as dear as London. But Mrs. Craven Conyers contrived, in her own wary, stout-hearted fashion, to carry on the battle of life, in despite the double, triple, and even quadruple prices of all that sustains it. She knew Paris too well to pay sixteen shillings for a lobster, or ten for a fowl, as some of our ingenuous countrywomen, and still more Americans, are persuaded by the plausible dealers of the newer Avenues, or of the imposing Palais Royal, to do. Her pretty furniture was her own, and she had a long lease of the roomy *appartement* which she occupied on the second floor of an enormous mansion, with its spacious courtyard and walled garden, solidly built of hewn stone, and standing in a dull but dignified street of that aristocratic faubourg, of which the French rarely speak, save with bated breath. There was a wealthy stock and sharebroker *au premier*, whose rent was the chief mainstay of the

proprietress of the house—a little old marchioness, widowed, childless, infirm, and poor, whose armorial bearings were above the stately *porte cochère*, but who lived in a corner of her ancestral abode, like a courtly mouse in the corner of a honey-combed cheese.

It said much for the widow of Colonel Conyers, that the bent figure, the beady black eyes, and the silver white hair, and black dress trimmed with point lace yellowed by age, of her noble landlady, were to be seen at her parties. For old Madame de Kerougrée, *née* de Coétlogon, and counting kindred with the great families of Rohan and Beaumanoir, was one of that knot of Breton Chatelaines who dislike foreigners, abhor heretics, and have a Spartan scorn for new fortunes, new governments, and new ideas. The *agent de change*, who was her most profitable tenant, was notoriously a Cræsus, and not undistinguished in his line, being a baron, a senator, and an officer of the Legion of

Honour, a frequent guest at Compiègne, and frequenter of the Empress's Monday's receptions. But the old marquise would no more have dreamed of accepting an invitation from the excellent spouse of Baron Chose, than she would of dancing at the Bal de l'Opera or spending an evening in the Closerie des Lilas; and the baron, on his part, never expected to be one of the privileged few who gathered, now and then, to sip barley water and play tric-trac, in the company of abbés and antique ladies, in the entresol of Madame de Kerougrée.

Madame Craven Conyers was a person to whom, in Anglo-Parisian estimation, the very highest consideration was due. Our countrymen resident abroad are apt to appraise one another in accordance with the opinion which the natives entertain of each household, and from this test, the colonel's widow emerged resplendent. The French aristocracy, the French plutocracy, and that influential set of people who govern

the country, who make war or peace, who mould the institutions of the nation, yet are excluded from society, thought well of Mrs. Conyers. She was poor, and that blemish is less conspicuous where revolution and proscription have lent a sort of romance to poverty. She was not a countess, and had not the *particule* which our Gallic neighbours prize above a dukedom. But they had gradually come to admit that, untitled and without the coveted "de" before her name, she was their equal. Then the foreign embassies, the vast hotels of those motley personages who draw their wealth from the uttermost corners of the earth to lavish it in Paris, had always opened their stately portals to Sir Peregrine's sister-in-law. It was thought an enviable distinction when an English newly-arrived family mentioned the having brought a letter of introduction to Mrs. Craven Conyers. She was very hard to know. The most exemplary of self-banished Britons, not born in the purple, would

have found it easier to be hand in glove at home with the Lord Lieutenant of their own shire, than with this widowed lady, who was at infinite trouble to make both ends of her scanty income meet without cracking under the strain.

Mrs. Craven Conyers, as she went to and fro through the suite of rooms which she had prepared for the reception of her guests from Crag Towers, was in herself an object worthy of special notice. A handsome woman in her youth, no doubt, and what her French friends called "well preserved" to that hour, tall, dark, and with a strange mixture of pliancy and stateliness. Few ladies of any nationality could contrive to be more tastefully dressed, and to spend so little on their attire. The American beauties, whose much-enduring papas groaned over Mr. Worth's bills for their eighty-guinea dresses, wondered how it was that Mrs. Conyers could look the type of fashion for an expenditure that was absurdly small compared with theirs. Of ornaments she

was fond, owning sundry valuable jewels, and being by no means chary of exhibiting them. "Gold does not spoil by keeping," she would say, "and emeralds and diamonds are the cheapest wear when you have got some. I patronize a little milliner on her promotion, who is thankful to be recommended by me, and is meek enough to do as I bid her, and cheaply. When she grows to be rich and independent, it will be time for me to look out for a new one." It was to a confidential friend, we may be sure, that this remark was addressed, and it affords a clue to the speaker's financial system. Mrs. Conyers did her shopping in dingy streets of the Marais, and was not above sending her frugal female cook, a swarthy Bretonne recommended by Madame de Kerougrée, and who had been thirty years in Paris without losing a single prejudice or quality of the hardy race she sprang from, all the way to the Halle Centrale, there to do her marketing at a rate not absolutely ruinous.

As the mistress of the *appartement* moved from room to room, superintending the final arrangements for the accommodation of her expected relatives, she had under her orders two industrious individuals of the male sex, named respectively Pierre and Jean Baptiste, who in their ample aprons, with soft slippers that made no sound on the well-waxed floors of polished wood, and with bushy heads of black hair that presented a quaint likeness to the turkey-feather brushes with which they whisked away the obtrusive dust that will settle on even the most elegant of furniture and fixings. In London, two men-servants would have been conventionally understood to imply, not wealth, of course, but substantial means. But Miss Conyers had been long enough in Paris to know that Gallic domestics of the masculine gender, who can turn their hands to anything, will do twice as much work, for but slightly higher wages, than any female servant to be hired for money. She had but four of

these stipendiaries in her service, namely Jean Baptiste and Pierre, the tough old cook from Brittany, and madame's own maid, who at first sight appeared to have an easy place of it, seeing that the other three divided between them all ostensible labours. But only Aline knew how crushing was the responsibility that rested on her wiry shoulders. It was no sinecure to be charged with the toilet of an employer so resolutely bent on disputing with Age every charm of which he strove to rob her, and on effacing from her keen, fine face every trace of years or of anxiety.

A fine face, delicate, originally, as to complexion, and with well-shaped features, a firm mouth, and an aquiline nose that suited well with the arching of the black eyebrows. It was marred, as was perceived on a very close inspection, by lines that told of care and thought, of striving and scheming, most of which, it must in justice be owned, had dated from the lifetime of the impecunious, lax-principled colonel, her

insolvent lord. Those days were over now. Mrs. Conyers did not owe a sixpence on either side of the Channel. But the old wounds had left their scars behind them, occasioning a preference on the part of the fashionable widow for those subdued lights and artful effects of dress, to which the young of her sex are so sublimely indifferent. A clever, worldly-wise face withal, a little hard, a little artificial, as to its expression, but not, assuredly, that of a bad or cruel woman. Mrs. Conyers had not accomplished so much of her earthly pilgrimage without contracting a few of those sordid stains and splashes from which few wayfarers are wholly free, but she had never wantonly stabbed the reputation of a rival, could speak well of the dear friend on whom the door had just closed, and had been known, though not very often, actually to do a kindness without hope of its return.

The expected travellers arrived in due time, and were made welcome by their kinswoman and hostess with a graceful warmth

that did her infinite credit. Mrs. Craven Conyers, as a veteran member of that continental variety of society which does not vote emotion ill-bred, had been used to express so many shades of feeling that she probably was seldom quite certain as to whether she was sincere or not. But she really was glad to see the party from Crag Towers. To Sir Peregrine she was bound by a thousand ties of gratitude for past generosity, a sentiment quite consistent with a lively sense that future benefits were not undesirable. She was fond of her niece and godchild, Adeline, whose beauty, high spirit, and resolute will, had from the first ingratiated her with the colonel's widow. Of Nellie, indeed, she thought but meanly, but she had a genuine curiosity as regarded Darrell.

"I don't like boys," the observant lady had said but a day or two before, in conversation with one or two of her intimate allies; "they have beefy hands that they do not know how to conceal, and great feet

that tumble over footstools and lap-dogs. They blush when they are looked at, stammer when they are spoken to, and stare with round eyes very wide open when nobody makes them miserable by addressing them. So much for the English type. You see I am quite impartial. French boys, excuse me, countess, are insufferably self-conceited—manikins that aspire to be men before they are emancipated from round jackets and the gold-laced caps of the Lycée. No, I don't like boys. Perhaps it is a prejudice. But I feel a sort of impatience to see my nephew, my great nephew—what an old woman that makes of me! for if one half of what they say of him be true, he will be a shining exception to my perhaps arbitrary rule against the young of his species."

And Mrs. Conyers had not been five minutes in Darrell's company before she, like others, began to feel the influence of the nameless charm that drew all hearts towards the strange, bright, gifted boy.

To tell the truth she was not prepossessed in his favour. But for him, her own son Craven would have been heir presumptive to the title and the estates. Nothing was more reasonable, according to the nature of things, than that Sir Peregrine's grandchild should be Sir Peregrine's successor. But then, Darrell, according to the strict ethics of the caste of whose opinion that of the Anglo-Parisian lady was the reflex, had no right to exist at all. His mother had been a Meanwell. The late Edmund Conyers had wedded outside the pale of society, and had, most justly, suffered social ostracism for that offence against the gynocracy of the blue blood. He and his eldest boy had died in India, and if Darrell had only died there too, it might have been possible for the colonel's widow one day to reign at Crag Towers, as vice-queen to her son, Sir Craven, so long at least as no new Lady Conyers should be brought home. Mrs. Conyers was therefore not prepared to like Darrell. But she did like him, almost as

soon as his fearless eyes had encountered hers; and the experience of a few hours confirmed her in the belief that the youthful heir had not been overpraised.

The meeting between Adeline and her aunt was characteristic. There were of course the usual embraces, the usual osculation, but as Mrs. Craven Conyers opened her arms to her dear niece, she looked at her with keen scrutiny, and at the same time tried by every stratagem she knew, to avoid the exposing her own face in too strong a light. Years had elapsed since their last meeting, years the tale of which mattered less to Adeline, who had been quite a young girl, than to the colonel's widow, who had reached at an earlier epoch a much more trying stage on life's high road. The result of the aunt's inspection was satisfactory enough. "It is the one advantage of the damp English climate," she said afterwards. "To wear well is easy when nature helps you."

Adeline seemed superbly indifferent to

her entertainer's examination of her proud cold beauty, as she was later to the compliments which Mrs. Conyers privately addressed to her on the freshness of her good looks.

Then the colonel's relict turned to Nellie. Her son had confided to her his own attachment to Sir Peregrine's younger daughter, and in her self-communings she had marvelled much as to his "infatuation," as she called it, on the subject of his gentle cousin. She could not easily understand how Nellie could have been chosen, in preference to the haughty loveliness of Adeline, by one domesticated under the same roof. Nellie, to be sure, was her sister's junior by some seasons, and was one of those quiet, amiable little creatures whom some men fancied. Still it was a pity that the young sailor's choice had not been a different one. Sir Peregrine might have been induced to do something magnificent towards Adeline's establishment in life. He would consent to no sacrifice for the sake

of his unassuming younger daughter. And then these long, almost hopeless, engagements were terrible things, causing as they did a young man to lose his best years, and to keep himself out of the marriage market—Mrs. Conyers might have been a Turkish purveyor of Circassian slaves, so thoroughly oriental were her ideas as to holy matrimony—until his chances of doing well for himself had considerably deteriorated. Altogether, Nellie's hostess would not have been sorry to hear that Nellie was to be married to Sir Harry, or to any of the lords, knights, esquires, or beneficed clergy in the Welsh Marches, leaving the captain free to form a prudent alliance.

There was nothing in Nellie's manner peculiarly calculated to win for her a larger meed of regard from her entertainer. She had always been somewhat afraid of her aunt, as unworldly persons are apt to be of those who are supposed to be graduates in social diplomacy, and now her very desire

to please served to embarrass her. She was the guest of Craven's mother: this second floor of the great, grim stone house, with the Kerougrée arms grinning in heraldic pomp above the tall gateway, was Craven's home. An odd, unhome-like home, yet here, doubtless, had the captain spent such portions of his childhood as school and the navy had not claimed. Poor Nellie would have given much to have won favour in the hawk-like eyes of Mrs. Craven Conyers, and she certainly did so far succeed as to establish in her aunt's mind the conviction that she was a well-meaning, pretty, simple girl. *Au reste*, she was an English miss, *la vraie miss anglaise*, and of that particular product of our country Mrs. Conyers had never undertaken the defence, under the vehement assaults of her foreign friends. There was indeed scanty sympathy between the widow of Sir Peregrine's brother—French by instinct, if one of ourselves by blood—and those noble, high-mettled, pure-minded girls who are the

boast of our country. Their large measure of personal freedom, their honest mirth and sterling sincerity, were not to her taste. And then Nellie, to her way of thinking, seemed less undeniably thoroughbred, less fit to make herself respected in a world bristling with traps and pitfalls, than her stately sister Adeline.

Whatever the private opinion which Mrs. Craven Conyers cherished with reference to the individual merits of her guests, at any rate she did her best, and not unsuccessfully, to give them a warm and kindly welcome. Her quick eyes detected the cloud on Sir Peregrine's brow, and her practised tact sufficed to dispel it for a time. She induced the baronet to talk, drawing him out, as the phrase is, with infinite skill and patience, and causing him to find a new source of interest in the bits of local information and gossip which she extracted from him. It was very long since Sir Peregrine's sister-in-law had seen Crag Towers, but she remembered enough of the

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place and the neighbourhood to enable her to keep the ball of conversation briskly rolling. Then she praised Darrell, always a certain mode of gratifying his grandfather. And she had much to say as to the pleasures in prospect. The visit which her kind relatives had been so good as to pay her should not be a dull one. That much she could promise. Early as it was in the season, many of her friends were in Paris, and that very morning there had arrived invitations from three embassies—those of Paraguay, Japan, and Araucania, with whose envoys Mrs. Conyers was on friendly terms—and which included the new arrivals. Little dinners, these of some eighteen or twenty *convives*, petty precursors of the Leviathan festivities yet to come. Then there was to be a Venetian fête at Princess Potscki's, and another at the Villa Esterhazy, and a score of winter receptions, official and private; a monster ball at the Hotel de Ville; a concert, which all Paris would attend, at the sumptuous residence of

Mrs. General Squash, from Cincinnati, a lady who avowed that she had come to Paris with the intention of spending a hundred thousand dollars, and whose three handsome daughters had been depicted as a trio, in fancy costume, as a transatlantic reproduction of the Graces. With these, and some other resources, Mrs. Craven Conyers hoped that the time might pass, not unpleasantly, until New Year's Day should give the signal for the commencement of the solid battle of which the preceding events would only have represented the light skirmishing. There were to be merry-makings more imposing than the Potscki fête, and more select than the Giant Crush over which Baron Haussman was to preside.

"Darrell would like to see a Court ball at the Tuileries; and indeed it would be a sad mistake that he should lose a sight that may soon be matter of history," said Mrs. Conyers to her brother-in-law, speaking as though she had a prescience that the torch and the petroleum-can of the Commune

would soon make desolate the gilded banquetting-halls of the rulers of France. "He is too young for a formal presentation, and there are all sorts of rules, but never mind! the Imperial Chamberlains will manage it somehow to please me, and we will all go to see the show, although I shall make my Legitimist friends furious. When I went to Fontainebleau, they were *au froid* with me for six weeks; and I had positively to refuse Compiègne last year, sooner than be *brouillée* with half our dear worshippers of Henri V.; but to attend a state ball is a different affair."

And so the matter was settled. Sir Peregrine, once fairly committed to a course of ostensible pleasure-seeking, was willing that his grandson and his daughters should enjoy their trip to the uttermost. For himself, the case was very different. There were a few old friends of his, of different nationalities in Paris, whom he would be glad to see again. For the rest, with so efficient a guide as Mrs. Craven

Conyers, the younger members of the party could very well dispense with his escort. And Sir Peregrine quietly made up his mind that neither the Princess Potscki, nor Mrs. General Squash of Cincinnati, should count among their guests in the flesh the master of Crag Towers.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

PARIS, as Darrell saw it, is no longer open to the pacific invasion of such ticket-provided Britons as may be tempted by the flaming posters of two rival railways to spend an agreeable ten hours in the transit from the English to the French capital. It was not, as it now is, the ghost of its old self: a Paris baffled and beaten, mutilated and despoiled, robbed and bleeding. The fair Queen, of the Seine had reigned so long, the petted darling of nations, the idol before whose dazzling image France bowed in worship, that she was incredulous of disaster and scornful of warning. Already, indeed, there were signs that the capricious metropolis, gorged with easily

got wealth, surfeited with the daily incense of adulation, was growing wanton in its discontent with the very system on the fruits of which it had fattened. The pampered steed, trapped with purple, and fed on gilded oats in a manger of Parian marble, nevertheless rebelled against the silken rein that held it. There was murmuring in the rat-haunted garrets of the Banlieu, and in the abandoned quarry-holes of Montmartre, where the poorest of the poor stretched out their weary limbs at night. There was murmuring among the well-fed army of white-bloused stonemasons, who earned high pay for hard work on those stately houses which every day seemed to sprout from the ground like petrified mushrooms. There was murmuring in shop and barrack, in studio and painting-room, in forge and factory.

Yet the tokens of material prosperity were numerous enough to force themselves on every eye. Sated as the people were with Imperial glories, restlessly eager as

they were for a war, for a change of some sort, for a shuffling of the cards in the grand game of politics that should cause a quicker sweeping of the stakes; they seemed, as a rule, to have thriven exceedingly. The mercer or the bootmaker who snarled savagely against Cæsar at the Tuileries because he had been seven years in business, and wanted fifty thousand francs more wherewith to retire to his villa at Auteuil, appeared to lack for nothing, and was at the theatre, with or without his family, seven nights in the week. The strong young fellow from Limoges, a large part of whose wages went home to his widowed mother in the south, week by week, hardly knew why he growled over his canon of thin blue wine at the workmen's tavern, where he ate his plentiful meals of soup and boiled beef. He was overworking himself sadly, it is true, and growing old before his time as he toiled at the magnificent house that Parisian Jack was always building—no flimsy brick

and stucco edifice such as Londoners put up with perforce, but a solid, monstrous mansion of hard white limestone, floored and joisted with the best of timber, yet hurried up from foundation to roof-tree with a fierce rapidity that was purchased by the lost lives of sorely tasked mechanics. Yonder bearded sculptor, puffing at his briar-root pipe while the long-haired young painter harangues him with revolutionary zeal, is well paid whenever he condescends to handle clay and modelling stick, and has more to lose than to gain by disturbance. The rag-picker's hook and basket will not bring him in, as now, his average five francs for kennel-raking when there shall be a less spendthrift society to fling flotsam and jetsam into the gutters.

Of all this smouldering discontent Sir Peregrine's grandson, or, for that matter, his elder relatives, saw little and thought less. Mrs. Craven Conyers was herself as indifferent to the condition of the slumbering volcano as were the dwellers in Pompeii

to the humours of that Vesuvius whose lava long since overtopped their streets. She was quite shrewd enough to see that the actual state of things would not endure, that an old toy must be broken, a new toy adopted, by the fickle inhabitants of the city which she had elected as her home: but what of that? Somebody, by right divine or by the will of the people, would live in the Tuileries, and would set an example of liberal expenditure and brilliant display. Kings might come and kaisers go, but Paris, opulent, glittering, alluring Paris, would run on for ever like a Pactolus. The Anglo-Parisian lady but shared the faith of her many friends, that there was one earthly institution out of the reach of storm or decay, and that the institution was the deathless prosperity of splendid, insolent Lutetia.

“How well you speak French! Not a trace of the English accent!” said the colonel’s widow a day or two after the arrival of her guests, when Darrell had

surprised her by replying to the questions which some of her visitors put to him, with little expectation that what they said would be understood by the boy fresh from England.

"I assure you," said Adeline, almost tartly, "that the revelation of this accomplishment astonishes us—I can answer for myself at least — as much as it can you, my dear aunt. I was not aware that my nephew's scholarship was so extensive."

"I think I must have a turn for languages," answered Darrell coolly. "I know more of Hindustani, of course, but I was taught a little French very early, and by somebody who was a native of France, I suppose, and took snuff I know, but I wonder that I remember any of it now."

Nor was the boy ever induced to be very fluent in the tongue of the country in which he was for a short time a sojourner, although it was evident that he comprehended well enough the purport of such conversations as took place around him.

Once or twice Mrs. Craven Conyers detected a singular smile on Darrell's lips, as he noticed, amid the heaped-up riches of the gaudy Boulevards, or in the side walks of the Bois de Boulogne, near the lake around which the sumptuous equipages slowly passed in triple rank, some haggard, envious, gaunt face, that matched well with the vile apparel, bloodshot eyes, and a beard of a week's growth, or perhaps the half-wolfish looks which a troop of squalid children threw at the pageant of ostentatious pleasure-seekers.

"I would give something to read your thoughts, Darrell!" said Mrs. Conyers once, speaking softly, and so as to be heard by Darrell alone, as on a sunny winter's afternoon they all walked at a leisurely pace on the well-kept gravel of the Bois, at the traditional spot where the press of carriages was greatest.

"You are welcome to them, *chere tante*," answered the boy, smiling again, as he turned towards his hostess, with whom he

was now a favourite. "I was thinking, as I watched these carriages pass, the satin-skinned horses with their jetty manes as cared for as a lady's hair, the coroneted panels, the silver on the harness, the servants in fur and gold lace, the chignons of saffron hue, the velvets and sables, the indolent attitudes of those fair owners who lean back so languidly, and scarcely return the salutations of the mounted gentlemen curveting hard by: I was thinking, I say, how full of hate and bitterness my heart would have been, had I been like that—or that!" And as he spoke, by a quick gesture he indicated the stunted figure of a young girl whose meagre form might have belonged to a child of some eleven years, but who was probably much older, and whose erratic movements provoked more than one petulant remonstrance, as she darted to and fro among the horses' feet, to snatch up something from the ground before it should have become the prize of one out of some three or four other ill-clad urchins of both

sexes, who were her competitors in the search. "The *concierge* told me," said Darrell, in the same undertone as before, "that there are many—he said hundreds—who live by picking up cigar-ends to be sold again to the illicit manufacturers of cheap tobacco. Seven sous a day, with luck, they may hope to make. It is not much wherewith to keep soul and body from quite parting company. And then, look at *that* face, before the Imperial carriage comes between us and hides it from our sight."

The countenance which Darrell pointed out was one which would have haunted a great painter in his dreams, until he had laid the hideous ghost by transferring it to canvas, but which he would never have sold, be his studio never so fashionable. The face of an old man with ragged grey hair, a grizzled beard, no perceptible linen, and a suit of sodden, shapeless clothes of no very definite colour. The face alone was worthy of notice, with its deep furrows on brow and cheek, the sullen glare of

the baleful eyes, the covert grin of the tigerish mouth, the indefinable expression of features that betrayed no lack of intelligence. An evil face—that of a human wild beast, cowed and kept down, but watching, like some demoniac of old, for an opportunity to spring and rend and tear, when the safeguards of law should be withdrawn. Not a face that told of hunger or of the vulpine instinct to steal, but that of an enemy rather to all that men have hitherto held safe and sacred, waiting for the hour when there should be a gap in the sheepfold through which to enter.

“Some *forçat* released from Toulon, I should say; and a horrid wretch he looks to be,” remarked Mrs. Craven Conyers, with an involuntary shudder. “I hope, dear boy, no one has been unsettling your mind with socialist doctrines or levelling theories of any sort. Whatever is is for the best, and I would rather you had not called my attention to that dreadful man, with whom it is impossible that you can have any sympathy.”

"Sympathy? No," returned Darrell readily; "unless it is because we never see man or woman fallen so low that we might not ourselves, but for our happier fortune, have sunk into the same mire in which they wallow. But our old friend with the beard has the air of a bad fellow, and I should not have singled him out if I had not seen a dozen such within the last half-hour. I can partly understand his feelings though, as he looks on at all this. But here is the Empress's barouche and four, with postillions and outriders in green and gold, the Imperial bees everywhere, and the whole turn-out perfection for taste and finish, as you told me it would prove—a sight much better worth seeing than rags and penury, greed and rage."

"I wish I could quite understand that boy. He puzzles me sometimes," said Mrs. Conyers afterwards to her niece Adeline.

"He puzzles us all, I am afraid," returned Adeline, with a slight upward movement of her graceful shoulders. "But

he and I are not on sufficiently cordial terms to make me a fair judge as to Darrell's merits and demerits. As to his cleverness there can be no doubt at all."

Mrs. Craven Conyers began to think that Sir Peregrine's pride in his grandson had a more solid justification in fact than she had at first conceived possible. She was not in general disposed to swell the chorus of flattery that surrounds Young Hopeful, when the lucky lad who has been born with a silver spoon in his mouth shows any aptitude which gives a handle for indiscriminate praise. But she soon learned to see in Darrell something very different from the family prodigies with whom she had as yet met; and to believe that her son had not been very far wrong when he had said, in answer to some expression of condolence on her part as to the blighting of his prospects of succeeding to the lands and title:—"They will be in fitter hands, mother. The youngster will make a better baronet, ten times over, than I should."

Meanwhile the round of Parisian gaieties went steadily on, although as yet the old year was not entirely spent, and bachelors of wide popularity and small income passed moodily along the line of the Boulevards, revolving in their uneasy minds how to combine solvency with the exacting demands of society, when the dreaded 1st of January should at length arrive. There would be black looks, and no more dinner invitations from Madame Perrichon, in the Madeleine quarter, unless little Julie were made happy with a hundred-franc doll's house, and doll worthy of such a structure. The cheapest box of sugar-plums that he could dare to offer to the bride of his good friend Brasseur, the notary, had risen to two Napoleons, such was the rapacity of dealers in bonbons. His female cousins would compromise for a ten-franc bouquet each, but how was he to screw out of the budget the wherewithal to propitiate his moneyed aunt, Mlle. Ursuline, on whose comfortable savings nine nephews and nieces cast covetous glances! And

then, the porter, the postman, the legion of petty persecutors who would have the pleasure of wishing him happiness and prosperity on the first day of the year; every verbal felicitation demanding an acknowledgment more or less substantial!

Adeline Conyers, in this glittering scene, seemed to be more in her element than had ever been the case at Crag Towers, and appeared to derive pleasure, too, from the admiration which her beauty drew forth, and from the compliments which reached her, at second hand, through the medium of her aunt. The compliments were not of the base metal that so frequently passes current among the polite frequenters of a salon. Miss Conyers really was very much admired. That she was, with all her brilliancy of complexion, and litheness of form, no longer in her first youth, was scarcely a disadvantage in a city where the good looks of married ladies are the common theme of discourse, and where the *ingénue* just introduced into society is regarded as a mere

callow fledgeling not yet arrived at the dignity of womanhood. But there was one element, to her fancy, lacking in this Paris, that she had known long ago, and now revisited, and this she discovered to be the solid reality which she had appreciated in the capital of her own country. In London she had constantly encountered in private life, at dinner, ball, and drum, the great Englishmen whose names were on every lip, and printed in every newspaper—the political leaders of the day. The very rumours that were flying about had reference to parliamentary or ministerial changes, concerning which the listeners actually did care somewhat, matters which affected all whose interests were bound up with those of Britain.

In Paris it was otherwise. Nobody seemed in earnest, and public life, so far as Adeline could perceive, to be viewed as a mere scramble for place and preferment, a lottery in which none but Puritans scrupled to cheat whenever the chance presented

itself. A lampoon signified more in popular estimation than a new law, and a *mot* that would pierce, like a poisoned shaft, through the Imperial purple, and make Cæsar wince in the midst of his power and his greatness, gained a renown for its author that the most cogent arguments would have failed to win. That every one had his price, and that no one would give himself the trouble to be supremely disagreeable to the authorities, save to be bought off on his own terms, appeared the merest matter of course. "If he goes on writing in that style," would be a typical remark, "we shall see his name in the official part of the *Moniteur* ere long as secretary of embassy, or prefect of some department in the south. That last number had a stab in every epigram."

"They won't bid high enough," would be the cool reply. "The sale of his paper since the last prosecution is enormous, and he is getting rapidly rich. Nothing less than one of the minor legations, with a commandership of the Legion, will gag him; so I sup-

pose they will be obliged to confer a fresh martyrdom upon him, and send him to Mazas. He'll find plenty of brother journalists to keep him company in the prison, and it's no very crushing hardship, as they live *à la pistole*, and want for nothing but liberty."

The Jour de l'An came, with its showers of cards, gifts, and bouquets, the incessant stamping of horses and rattling of wheels upon the pavement, as everybody paid or received the visits that custom exacted; its official receptions, salvoes of cannon, and exhibition of tiny tricoloured streamers and tinselled eagles around the colossal statues in the Place of Concord. The next event of any note for which the Conyers family had to prepare was the presentation at the first state ball at the Tuileries. Mrs. Craven Conyers had been as good as her word, and Darrell's name had been smuggled into the list of invitations, by favour of certain court functionaries, who were willing to risk a mild reprimand at her request. It was; as

she had said, a sight which could not fail to impress itself upon a boy of his years, and well worth seeing. She was not mistaken. It was even then tottering on its feet of clay, that golden image to which myriads and millions bent the knee. The last of the glorious days of the proud city—the modern Babylon, as Prussian writers were already beginning to call it—were at hand; and not for very long, to carry out the parallel, was Belshazzar, surrounded by guards and courtiers, to hold high revelry, warned by no flaming characters upon the palace wall.

CHAPTER XII.

CÆSAR AT HOME.

"*Holdà, cocher ! halte là !* Unless you have a blue card to show us, *mon brave*, you'll have to turn your nags' heads and trot back to the end of the *queue*, *nom d'un nom !*" exclaimed one mounted policeman, clattering up to bar the way.

"He's a *rosbif !*" called out another trooper, who had a sergeant's stripes on his sleeve ; "he doesn't understand you."

And indeed Sir Peregrine's English coachman had a very qualified knowledge of the French tongue.

His master, however, cut the Gordian knot of explanation by lowering the glass of the window, and holding out for the

inspection of the police a card of the requisite colour.

"*Ah, bon! c'est ça*—the Court Marshal's authorization to break the line — *tant mieux!*" cried the sergeant, reining back his horse. "That carriage with you? Good, again! Let milor pass, you others." And the mounted municipals fell back and made room for the carriage which contained the baronet, Nellie, and Darrell, and the one which was occupied by Mrs. Craven Conyers and Adeline, to pass inside of the long file of slowly advancing vehicles, proceeding by jerks, soon to be checked by some fresh stoppage on the part of those ahead.

"It is fortunate," said Sir Peregrine, as he glanced again at his talisman, the blue card, "that your aunt thought of this."

It was characteristic of Mrs. Craven Conyers that she always did think of such things as that convenient *permission de couper la queue*, which was conceded to so few foreigners without the charmed

circle of diplomacy, and which abridged the sufferings of courtly pilgrims bound palace-wards. It is not only in England that access to the presence of royalty entails a good deal of physical exertion and endurance, and so, on this occasion, it proved. The night was fine, with a star-powdered sky of dark violet, but it was bitterly cold; the white frost clung to grass and leaves in the Tuileries gardens; the searching wind made itself felt through mantles of ermine and cloaks of sable. In the inner courtyard of the palace huge log fires were burning, around which, as around the blaze of a bivouac, coachmen and footmen, in liveries of every colour and style, crowded pell-mell to warm their chilled hands and feet, looking like so many enormous birds of tropical plumage, as seen by the leaping flames. There were numbers who grumbled enviously as they saw the privileged break the line of creeping vehicles, and set off at a round trot towards the portico, while more than one too ambitious

Jehu paid the penalty of his rashness in straying from the beaten track by having, under compulsion, to retrace his steps to the very rear of the procession. It was creditable to the forethought, and to the influence, of the colonel's widow, that her party belonged to the first of these two categories.

It was something, too, to have induced Sir Peregrine to put on his deputy-lieutenant's uniform, and escort his daughters to a festivity so imposing. Before the days of July, the baronet had trodden the polished floors of the Tuileries pretty often. But he had been a young man then, and Charles the Tenth had been king. He had dined with Louis Philippe since those times, but had never crossed the threshold of the palace since its occupation by its present master. It had required his sister-in-law's power of persuasion to induce him to attire himself in scarlet for such a purpose; but the idea of witnessing his grandson's pleasure and

surprise had prevailed with him, and he had yielded. It would, however, have needed an observer gifted with microscopic vision to have detected any signs of amazement in the bright, frank face of Darrell Conyers, country-bred though he was, at the sights which met his eyes. That he took in the meaning and purport of what he saw, of the symbols and external trappings that environ royalty, was plain enough from the intelligent glances which he cast to the right and left: but of mere astonishment there was no more than is evinced by some Indian chief who is suddenly brought from his wilds to the peopled cities of the Atlantic States.

And yet there was much, very much, to excuse the simple, wondering curiosity, which at Darrell's impressionable age would have appeared but natural. Nothing could well be in stronger contrast to the everyday life and habits of Englishmen than that double hedge of troops that lined the broad thoroughfare, the imposing parade

of military force that almost hid from view the jostling mass of the spectators. There were the towering bear-skins, the medalled breasts, the glistening bayonets of the Guard; then a strong detachment of Cuirassiers, the torch-light streaming on the horse-tailed casques and burnished corselets; then more Cavalry, Hussars of the Guard, gorgeous in gay jackets and the loose Hungarian pelisse, and presently a picquet of turbaned soldiery, that choice Arab infantry to whose safe keeping it was Cæsar's whim to entrust his palace and his person. It will be long before the world beholds such another sight as that of the grand staircase of the Tuileries, on every second step of which stood, like a warlike statue of more than mortal stature, one of the gigantic Cent Gardes, whose nodding helmets overtopped the throng that lingered to gaze on their rich garb and unusual proportions, the steel breast-plates, polished to the brightness of a mirror, giving back the radiance of the many lights around.

Strange, that white marble, and gold leaf, and flowers, and crimson carpeting, and gleaming armour, can combine to make palpable to the senses that concrete idea of pomp and power which statistics fail to impart. Yet so it was. There were few there who did not feel that, after all, it was a grand thing to be an emperor, and none, or next to none, who suspected the hollowness of the show, and knew on what frail foundations rested the glittering fabric of absolute sway.

It is easy, of course, to be wise after the event, or to solve a riddle of which we know the answer. To ordinary observers, at any rate, the empire still seemed to be in its vigorous maturity. The very spectacle of those gilded salons, filled well-nigh to the utmost, testified to the high regard in which the master of so many as yet unconquered legions was held abroad and at home. Rats, it is said, run from a falling house, but no such signs of desertion were here visible—here, in this crowd

of brilliant uniforms, of sheeny satin and rustling brocade, of jewelled coronets and plumes, and of flowery wreaths, where not a square inch of sober black broad-cloth was permitted to mar the bright mass of varied colours. A very Babel of languages was spoken on every side, as might have been expected where the green-coated Russian was in close contact with the Austrian in his white tunic, and the brown uniform of the Spanish cazador contrasted with the Swedish blue or the British scarlet. The whole assemblage, as it poured in long array from room to room, resembled nothing so much as the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope, the countless lights flashing on the diamonds and the sword-hilts, on gorgeous embroidery and gleaming gems, on fair faces and sweeping trains, and all the triumphs of the milliner's art. The strains of the music, pealing forth its spirit-stirring invitations to the waltz, were ringing through the long vista of those splendid rooms, and glimpses could

be caught here and there, through the crush and surging to and fro of the throng, of the revolving forms of the dancers.

It was curious to mark how the different characters of Sir Peregrine's two daughters made themselves manifest, as they mingled with the richly dressed groups. For whereas Nellie's gentle timidity only served to increase the prettiness of her dainty little face, Adeline drew herself up with a haughty grace that would have become a queen, and moved across the palace floors with an assured and stately step, as if it were only in the midst of such surroundings that the proud beauty felt herself to be thoroughly at home. But now the attachés of the various legations were seen darting through the crowd, like seals in the pursuit of their finny prey, and exercising their diplomatic abilities in the necessary duty of collecting the unrepresented members of the foreign contingent under the wing of their respective ambassadors. And the last strays of this polyglot flock of courtly

sheep had scarcely been gathered to the rest, before a lane was made through the crowd for the passage of the imperial entertainers. The presentations were accomplished, after that continental fashion that throws on royalty the duty of uttering a few gracious words, supposed to be appropriate to the antecedents of the person addressed, to every member of the semicircle formed by the new guests; and then the small procession glided on, and reached the throne room at last.

Let us hope that the offence of the chamberlain, guilty of smuggling a boy of Darrell's years into such august company, was condoned by the founders of the feast, and that the "Dear me, how irregular—never knew anything so vexatious in my life!" of a scandalized senior attaché, was not reciprocated by the personages principally concerned. Certainly the empress's smile was not less winning as she looked on Darrell's more than handsome face; and a spark of interest

kindled for an instant in Cæsar's melancholy eyes as he encountered Darrell's eager glance of frank curiosity. Then the business of the ball went on, light feet beating the mirror-like surface of the floor in harmony with the merry dance tunes, and a ceaseless clicking of fans and hum of voices, a clatter of steel scabbards and clinking of spur and sabretasch, resounded through those richly decorated rooms, the paintings on whose walls, the lustres and looking-glasses and gilded cornices of which, had looked down on many masters, and on many a fair company, and shall harbour such no more. There may have been, on that night, at the door of some wine-shop in a narrow street that opened on the spacious Rue de Rivoli, some unshaven fellow with a short black pipe between his bearded lips, scowling as he caught a distant vision, betwixt the cocked hats of the mounted police and the helmets of the cavalry, of the long façade with its lighted windows, and who even then

brooded over some such design as that which, a year or two later, was to take bodily form in the shape of a red column of sky-raking flame, staining to an ominous hue of blood the harmless waters of the Seine.

There may, quite as probably, have been functionaries present at ball and banquet, high officers of state, their breasts ablaze with decorations, their uniforms heavy with the gold thread which the needle of the patient embroiderer had piled there in many a strange device, who could, had they but chosen, have lifted a corner of the curtain, and allowed the light to stream in upon the rottenness that was hidden by so brave an outside—men cognizant of paper cohorts and imaginary parks of artillery, and stores that existed only in the fervent fancy of some military bureaucrat, and all the jugglery that may be perpetrated by means of printed columns of figures, neatly balanced by dexterous accountants. There must have been sly-

eyed, smooth-spoken wire-pullers, to whom politics meant stock-jobbing, and whose one object in promoting foreign or domestic discord was to rig the market. To these, and such as these, the fears of Europe, the anxieties of commerce, were simply as the stops of an organ by the aid of which to discourse gainful music. A frown, a covert threat, an ambiguous phrase, would send down the sensitive barometer of the funds, when the phrase, the threat, or the frown were those of Cæsar. A negotiation disavowed, a civil circular to envoys abroad, a furlough granted to some half-score of battalions, made Rentes rise with cork-like bouyancy, and could be discounted on the Bourse by those who were fortunate enough to anticipate the utterances of the oracle. The game of these cynical speculators was almost over, but as yet the board had not been swept clear.

"How did you like it, Darrell?" asked Sir Peregrine, as they drove homewards. It was late, then. The last dance was

going on, and the weary musicians took heart of grace at the prospect of soon reposing from their labours, and blew and scraped the harder in the effort to break down the energies of the five or six couples of Terpsichorean enthusiasts who persisted in their twirling. The supper—call it a banquet, rather than what that misused name so often implies—was over. All that truffles and dainty viands and crafty devices of cook and confectioner; all that rare wines and cooling drinks, and that champagne, which is historically and indissolubly an institution of the second empire; all that crystal and flowers and fernery, and massive plate of gold and silver, could do to please the palates and fire the blood and dazzle the eyes of the thousands there assembled, could do, had been done. And Sir Peregrine's very natural inquiry of the youngest guest there, his grandson, had been as to how he had personally enjoyed the evening's pleasure.

"I liked it," returned Darrell promptly ; "liked it very much. And I thank you, sir, and Aunt Craven, for giving me the chance of seeing what I have seen. Bright and splendid as it was, to my fancy there was an air of unreality about the whole thing that I dare say would not have been found in other and duller courts. It seemed to me—I know, grandpapa, you like me always to speak without fear or favour, so I'll risk being thought ungrateful for the kindness which has enabled a lad like me to be a spectator of such a scene—well, then, it seemed to me as if every one were playing a part; as if the place were a theatre. I could not, if I were cross-examined, tell you why the wild notion occurred to me. Lookers on, they say, see most of the game. But so it was."

"And the emperor—you have seen his portraits often and often," said Sir Peregrine. "What did you think of him in the flesh? The question, perhaps, is hardly a fair one," he added.

"And it is one I am not able to answer," replied the boy after a moment's thought. "Perhaps everybody is a little disappointed on meeting, face to face, some famous personage of whom one's mind has traced a picture, and at finding the giant so many inches shorter than his likeness. That he was very much bored, any one might see. But his eye it was that puzzled me. I think, if I were the master of all those magnificences, and of the solid power that lies behind them, I should be happier than he is."

Sir Peregrine smiled one of those smiles that indicate the complacent superiority in wisdom of the old over the young.

"It is natural at your time of life that you should think so, my dear boy," he said, laying his hand lightly on Darrell's golden curls. "It is very natural. But conceive yourself, if you can, with the weight of care, the responsibility, the crushing burthen of state secrets, which our late host has to bear, and I question

whether you will still think that you should be happier than he is, or more capable of enjoying a fine entertainment like that which we have just quitted."

Darrell laughed. His laugh was the only one which was welcome to Sir Peregrine's ear. The baronet was not, in general, very tolerant of what he held to be unseemly explosions of mirth; but Darrell's was the clear, low, musical laughter of a child, fresh and spontaneous as the notes of the lark as he soars up to heaven's gate, welling, as it seemed, from a heart overcharged with innocent joy.

"I had forgotten that, indeed," answered the boy, turning towards his grandfather. "It would not suit me, I'm afraid, to carry about with me such a load as that."

"Indeed it would not, Darrell dear!" said Nellie, in the half-timid tone of affection which she sometimes employed towards the hope and heir of the family; while Sir Peregrine nodded approval of the sentiment.

"I agree with my daughter," he said, after an instant's pause. "I never, in my experience, met with a nature less fit to bear about the galling weight of care, sorrow, and apprehension, which the possession of a secret implies. A frank, free spirit like yours, my boy, would chafe or droop beneath the task which public men, often most reluctantly, have to perform; the task, I mean, of dissembling their thoughts. Yours, or their drift, Master Darrell, are tolerably easy to read."

"I hope so," returned the boy, as his clear blue eyes, bright and limpid as Truth's own mirror, met those of his grandfather, and smiled back, as some eyes can smile, a kindly recognition of the old man's glance of indulgent admiration. It deserved to be admired, that bright, sunny face, the very intelligence and boldness of which seemed to be softened by the candour of the expression; such a face as a mother would almost worship were it that of her young son.

The streets through which they now rolled were well lighted, not merely by the fixed lamps but by those of the many carriages hastening back from the palace, and Darrell's ingenuous countenance could be distinctly seen. A time was to come, and at no distant date, when it would be painful to recall how the boy had looked, and how spoken, on that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUMMONED.

SIR PEREGRINE'S English servants, temporarily domiciled under the roof of Mrs. Craven Conyers, in the Rue de la Vieille Roche, and Faubourg of St. Germain, had their own opinion respecting the French servants, who made up the permanent garrison of that establishment. What the big melancholy footman from Crag Towers thought of Pierre and Jean Baptiste, their bushy heads, and their aprons and feather brushes, and their adaptability to any work, at any moment, their easily provoked laughter, their undignified hurry when summoned by the sound of the bell, may be more easily guessed than depicted. "Unmanly, I call it," was his favourite

expression of censure; but what he felt—what was the measure of his scathing scorn, a Homeric power of expression could alone pourtray. But he admitted that the tough old cook, from the Breton bishopric of Vannes, was a model of tidiness, and an exemplar of industry; while he was deferential to Mademoiselle Aline, the “own maid” of the baronet’s Anglo-Parisian sister-in-law, of whom he spoke as of a young person who knew a thing or two—a sentiment cordially echoed by Miss Tucker, the English lady’s maid from Crag Towers, who also, in her own estimation and that of others, had some slight acquaintance with the world and its ways.

But Mademoiselle Aline, with all her native and cultivated tact, made a radical mistake on the day succeeding that of the Imperial ball, in her method of delivering to Miss Conyers a letter which had been put into her, Aline’s hands, not unaccompanied by some pecuniary compensation for the trouble which she was asked to take in

acting as postman, by a person of her own sex. The giver of the letter and of the gold ten-franc piece, a bribe that would have been spurned by the pampered menials of some Parisian households, but which was welcome to the modestly salaried attendants of prudent Mrs. Craven Conyers, was, as Aline judged, a stranger to the quarter, but yet had some acquaintance with the ways of the inmates of the roomy second-floor *appartement* in the Rue de la Vieille Roche. She certainly seemed to know the lady's maid's precise position in the household, since, on her return from some errand of her mistress's, she had pounced upon her, saying, with urbane decisiveness: "A thousand pardons, mademoiselle; you are the *camériste* of an English lady, Madame Conyers? Good, and she has beneath her roof two other ladies, relatives of hers, also of the Conyers name. One, the eldest, is beautiful, and is called Adeline. It is to her that I pray you to convey this letter, which I entrust to your considerate care. It is

only *pour mémoire* that I add the useless injunction—useless, that is, to one of your *savoir faire* and elegant address—that it is to be privately conveyed to its destination. Were it not so, I could have left it with yonder animal of a *concierge*, ay, or awaited the ladies' descent into the street to enter the carriage for shopping, visiting, *quoi!* You will do a good action, and accept a mother's thanks, with this——" the last words having reference to the gold ten-franc piece—"which I wish were a *cadeau* more worthy, but, *hélas*, I am not rich. You will kindly execute my commission? Thanks! It presses, but, above all, let it be quietly performed."

And Mademoiselle Aline, to the best of her conscientious belief, earned her ten francs by her manner of delivering the letter. That she tried to acquire a knowledge of its contents is quite in accordance with the traditions of domestic service. Now, it is notoriously easy to open and reclose an envelope that is merely gummed,

as most envelopes are in this careless age of constant correspondence. Nor is it too difficult, to an experienced practitioner, to open one that is secured by wax alone. But to unseal and reseal a letter which has wax without and gum within, is affirmed on competent authority to be impossible to even the neatest-fingered Phillis or the smuggest of quasi-butlers. In the *Cabinet Noir* of a continental post-office—a very Chamber of Horrors, which reforming post-masters-general have failed to detect, but which is accessible to those of a different frame of mind, these trifling mechanical difficulties are no doubt surmounted. But Aline knew no mode of getting at the kernel of the nut which she held in her hand, except, of course, by the heroic remedy of sacrificing nut, kernel, and all. And this she was not prepared to do.

Now, to hand the note to Miss Tucker, the English maid, would have been by far the best way of securing the speedy delivery of the missive. But Aline and Tucker were

two rivals, or at any rate independent powers, and either would have been averse to have recourse to the good offices of the other. Nor had Aline the slightest wish to avow to the Abigail from Crag Towers, or to share with her, the meagre donation which had been her retaining fee. Indeed, she was a little ashamed of admitting, before an insulary—a child of the blonde Albion, a country where gold was as the paving-stones, and all the respectable inhabitants became enormously rich by selling rum and little penknives to the poor benighted savages of India and the “colonies”—that she could be influenced by the contemptible present of an eight-shilling gold coin. Aline knew the worth not only of gold and silver, but of a bronze sou, as well as any girl in Paris; but she suspected that foreigners had another standard, and she was desirous to hide her petty acquisition, as others are their petty economies.

Sir Peregrine, Miss Nellie, Madame Craven Conyers, these were the three

family ogres whose supervision of the clandestine document was to be feared. Sir Peregrine, in Paris, stayed within doors, for lack of his usual occupations, in Aline's opinion, to an exasperating extent. Miss Nellie, too, was an obstacle. But Madame was the grand difficulty. Madame, such was her waiting-maid's inward opinion, had the eyes of a cat, and, moreover, the *flair* of a French woman for whatever of a secret nature was going on. Yet, having accepted the letter, she was bound to carry it to its destination, and that promptly. Her character was, in a sense, at stake. The French, and especially Paris-born French females of Aline's degree, whose earliest recollections are of the lofty gallery of some theatre, whither they had been carried by father and mother, in company with nuts, oranges, black bottle, and umbrella, on a Sunday night, are governed to an extent hard to realize by the teachings they have imbibed from the stage. The stage is to the French what the pulpit has been to

some nations—a treasury of moral counsel. And when had Aline seen a soubrette, on the farther side of the footlights, embarrassed for more than a minute or so, as to the commonplace duty of smuggling a billet-doux! But when Aline, after long watching, waylaid Miss Conyers, on the threshold of the chamber-door, she at first paid little attention, as she transferred the mysterious letter to Adeline's hand, to Darrell's sudden emerging from his own room opposite. He had his gold-mounted whip in his hand, and was going out to ride. Sprite had been left at Crag Towers; but there are decent mounts to be had for money at the Parisian livery stables, and the boy, at Sir Peregrine's wish, had plenty of his accustomed exercise, with or without the escort of a groom. Generally, at Darrell's desire, that attendance was dispensed with. There are men whose love of ease, or sense of dignity, demands that somebody should trot at their heels whenever they ride abroad. Darrell belonged to a different category.

Now the French maid did not fathom Darrell's character, a circumstance which did not by any means discredit the natural perspicuity of which she was slightly vain. Darrell's was a disposition not to be read at a glance. But she thought that she understood it. "Bah!" had been her comment more than once on the outspoken admiration of the Crag Towers' servants for their youthful master. "Such a face, *gentil à croquer*, is thrown away on a stupid English lad. *Très beau garçon*, if you will; beautiful as an angel, and moves like a young prince; but what of that? A French boy of his years and looks would be a little demon, like the Vicomte de Bréhan, or the fourteen-year-old Chevalier de Loches. This is a child that they spoil with praises."

Wherefore Aline the maid was inclined at first to pay no attention to Darrell's sudden entry on the scene, as she was in the act of handing to Miss Conyers the letter which had been confided to her care; and it was only when the *belle demoiselle anglaise*

started and changed colour that she recognized the mistake which she had made. Then, indeed, the quick-witted soubrette divined that Adeline, who must know a great deal more of young Monsieur Darrell than she did, was anything but indifferent to the boy's scrutiny, and she began with rapid plausibility to give a long and purely fictitious message purporting to be from Madame Blot, the lace-mender, under cover of which she trusted that the delivery of the letter would pass unnoticed. Nor did Darrell appear to perturb himself in the least about the by-play that was enacted before his eyes; but with a good-humoured word or two addressed to Miss Conyers as to the prospect of his meeting with her later in the Bois, he opened the outer door and clattered downstairs.

"You have done wrong," said Adeline; an expression of annoyance on her features: "wrong, first of all, in charging yourself with such an errand, but that I am sure was undertaken with a wish to serve me,"

"It was *pour le bon motif*, believe me, miladi," interjected the waiting-woman meekly, as she stroked her apron of thick muslin—such an apron, with deep pockets and a narrow pink ribbon to garnish it, as her congeners wear in many a comedy and many a vaudeville.

"Secondly," continued Adeline, "in giving it, as you did, before yonder boy, who does not love me—ah! that is no secret, *ma mie!*—and who has the eyes of a lynx. Has he started, think you, for his ride? Or was his talk concerning the Bois a mere pretext to delude me? Can you find out, to oblige me, that much?"

The soubrette flew down the triple flight of stairs—past the entresol where Madame de Kerougrée dwelt and economized amidst the portraits of her Armorican ancestors—past the first floor inhabited by gold-compelling Baron Chose, and so reached the porter's lodge. The porter was a dullard, a slow, scrupulous, elderly Alsatian. But then there was his wife, familiarly known as the Mère

Schoppard, and whose life to all appearance was spent in the pains-taking preparation of that cabbage-soup, the constant simmering of which had caused the little cell of the Cerberus on whom devolved the guardianship of the great barrack of a house, to resemble in flavour an enlarged rabbit-hutch. What Aline the maid imparted to the wife Schoppard in a few winged words matters less than that the winged words bore immediate fruit. It is wonderful how quickly servants contrive to establish an understanding with outsiders of any sort, and how promptly the paid and the unpaid combine against that common enemy, the purse-bearer. If you are rich enough to buy a horse, and have any taste for the study of the lights and shadows of human nature, it may interest you to see how, by a wink or a nudge, the dealer makes an ally of your coachman or groom. George, honest fellow, can't see that spavin; is blind to the marks of firing, and believes, he does, the 'orse to be a good one. Jerry, who was

born in a loft and reared in a stable, makes proof of a charity that thinketh no evil as regards that suspicious off hind-foot that can just bear contact with the turf and soft mud; and doesn't think the chestnut more than eight years old, worn as are his teeth, and tell-tale as are the hollows beneath his eyes.

In this instance it was not against an employer that Madame Schoppard was invited to coalesce with her intimate acquaintance from upstairs. The former, however, readily understood that some breach of domestic discipline was involved, and therefore entered willingly into the scheme. After all, the old Adam is distressingly strong in some of us, and there is sympathy with most revolts against lawful rule and legitimate authority. The zest with which servants enter, on behalf of almost any member of a family, into whatever savours of intrigue, is extraordinary, and can only be attributed to a genuine love of the excitement caused by concealment and crooked ways. In less than

ninety seconds little Félicie Schoppard, one of those hard-eyed, prematurely old little girls who are only to be found on the sunnier side of the Channel, was in the street, her basket in one hand and some *gros sous* rattling in the other, innocently intent, no doubt, on some small purchase. The report of this artful innocent, on her return to head-quarters, was to the effect that the young milor Anglais had mounted and ridden off without delay in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne. The small emissary knew this from information supplied, first by an old cobbler, who spent his shining hours in patching shoes which, like the mender, had seen their best days ; and secondly from two *gamins*, sons of neighbours, who were engaged in the immemorial game of chuck-farthing not far from the wooden box, jammed in between two tall houses, in which the man of leather plied his needle and awl. The helper from the livery stable, he who had brought the horse to the door, was refreshing himself at a

drinking-shop at the corner, and might even then be seen as he stood sipping liquor at the entrance of that house of entertainment.

The helper in question, a broken-down English groom, who had drifted into the employ of Messrs. Snaffle and Leggup, Rue Castiglione, jobmasters, had not much to say, when Madame Schoppard, following on the heels of her astute offspring, dropped in at the emporium of the grocer who kept the shop entitled *Au Bon Coin*—a shop where cassis and bad brandy were vended in little leaden measures across the sloppy counter—contrived to enter into conversation with him whilst ostensibly engaged in cheapening a brace of lemons. “The young genelman” had gone towards the Bois. He wouldn’t meet many that could match him there for a neat seat in the saddle, or for a light hand on the rein; of that the helper would bet a Nap. if he had one. A nice free-handed young genelman, too—whereas the stableman was sorry to say that shabbiness was a growing vice among

those who ought to have some consideration for pore fellows that have met with misfortunes in life. This and more did the half-drunken myrmidon of Messrs. Snaffle and Leggup declaim over his adulterated dram; but the porter's wife managed to sift from much chaff some good grain, which, conveyed as it was in bad and broken French, was yet sufficiently intelligible. When she returned to her own lodge she was able to inform the *suivante* of Madame Conyers that the youthful milor had shown no sign of preoccupation, had given some loose silver to the communicative helper, and had said nothing, save to order the man to be in readiness to take back the horse in "about" three hours' time. Sometimes Darrell chose to dismount, after his excursion, at the door of his great-aunt's abode, but quite as often he preferred to give up his horse at the stables in the Rue Castiglione and to return home on foot. To-day it was the former course that he was about to pursue.

Adeline breathed more freely when she received the report of the adroit waiting-maid. At any rate, her apprehension of Darrell's vigilance had been a false alarm. Whether or not the boy's quick eyes had detected any symptoms of mystery in the delivery of the letter, he was either indifferent to the cause, or had no means of elucidating the truth. He was gone, and the coast was clear. Rewarding the *soubrette's* good offices on a scale which far surpassed that of the donor of the missive which had, as it were, established between them a link of union, Miss Conyers at once proceeded to attire herself as if for a walk, and went downstairs rapidly, but with no visible signs of hurry or confusion in her gait or mien.

Adeline, as she sallied forth, received and acknowledged the bearish bow of the porter, Père Schoppard, and the salutations of the other occupants of the cabbage-scented rabbit-hutch which was called the lodge, and then passed through the *porte cochère*

myself. And I readily conceived whose guest you were here in the faubourg, and contrived to have my little note conveyed to you without, as I hope, exciting any suspicion."

"Well!" said Adeline impatiently, "all this does not explain your motive. This very conduct of yours is a breach of compact. I was to be exempt, as your memory should remind you, from future importunity. That was distinctly understood between us when I placed the diamonds in your hands, madame."

"Listen!" returned Veuve Tracrenard with a sudden impressiveness. "It is not I who have summoned you, English lady. The voice that calls is one that will soon be hushed for ever. The hand that beckons must soon rest and moulder in the grave. At his wish—I——"

She broke down here with a real sob, and the tears that gushed from her hard old eyes were real too.

"He is ill, then?" said Adeline in an

altered voice, and then immediately added :
“ But, bah ! You have discounted my sympathy years ago for his broken health and needy condition. *Au reste*, how does it concern me ? ”

“ More than you are aware of, *belle demoiselle*,” said the widow with a spiteful emphasis. “ He of whom we talk has much upon his mind, and cannot die in peace until he has spoken with you. Come, then, and do not dally, for every sun that rises, so the doctor says, may be the last that he will look upon. Will you come, say, in an hour’s time ? I warn you, delay may prove dangerous.”

“ I will come, ” answered Adeline, after an instant’s hesitation. “ What is the address ? ”

Veuve Tracrenard drew from her black bag a card, on which were some lines of writing, and thrust it into Adeline’s hand.

“ You had better take a *fiacre*,” she said, “ so far as the Halle Aux Grains. Any one

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“ You had better take a *fiacre*,” she said, “ so far as the Halle Aux Grains. Any one

near the market will show you the Rue Raccroc for ten sous. It is but a poor place, mademoiselle, but I advise you to seek it, and soon."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE RUE RACCROC.

“RUE Raccroc, my *bourgeoise* ! Why then, I don't. There's a network of streets about here, ugly old *coupe-gorges*, most of them, where a *voiture de place* like mine would be as great a wonder as one of the emperor's gala carriages at Batignolles. Any of the brats, yonder, on the steps of the market-place, will show you what you want, for two sous' worth of fried potatoes. Thank you, *citoyenne* !” added the driver of the *fiacre* which had conveyed Adeline Conyers to the immediate vicinity of the Halle aux Grains, as he received his hire.

The gratuity had been liberal enough to soften his heart somewhat, for he checked himself in the very act of climbing to his

familiar perch on the box, to say, in an undertone : " Have a care, *bourgeoise* ! particularly if you're a foreigner, as I guess, *hein* ! This is a queer part of the town, I give you notice, and the folks of the *quartier* do not stand much chance for the Monthyon prize for virtue ; so if you get robbed, don't say it was for want of a hint." And with this well-meant but somewhat alarming piece of advice, the driver, one of those red-faced Automedons whom Normandy seems to rear for the express purpose of supplying hackney coachmen to the metropolis, laid his whip over his ill-groomed ponies, and rattled off. Adeline remained alone.

The place in which Miss Conyers now found herself was sufficiently remote from the districts that are the best known, whether to fashionable Parisian residents, or to the roving tourist. She was now in old Paris, in one of those islets of the Seine where the first Belgic settlers reared their wattled huts, and stockaded their villages

to withstand the assault of robber Franks and tyrant Visigoths, in sight of the ruins of Roman Lutetia. From that petty nucleus had grown up the warlike, wealthy, witty capital of fair France. No doubt there had been a time when great nobles had dwelt in feudal state within those cramped bounds, and a later period, when rich traders had stored their goods in the tall, blackened houses that reared their steep roofs so high in the murky air. But fashion, capricious in all lands, had long since fled the spot, and commerce had deserted it also. It was a decaying nook, as the neglected aspect of the gaunt dwellings clearly indicated, nor were there lacking signs of the character of that teeming population which had replaced bygone opulence and mediæval pomp. The squalid children of both sexes, brawling over their noisy play on the steps of the iron-roofed market, had the looks and gestures of little savages. There was something saturnine and wild in the faces of the three or four

women, their heads tightly swathed in those yellow handkerchiefs which the poorest poor of Paris affect, who were plodding homeward over the slimy stones, laden with charcoal and scraps of firewood, bought or pilfered on the wharves beside the river.

Adeline had indeed lost no time in obeying the summons which Madame Tracrenard had contrived privately to convey to her. One of those specious excuses, in which women of the world are proverbially fertile, had served to account for her absence, and for the renunciation of her ordinary habits, during that afternoon; and, thickly veiled, she had left her aunt's residence within half an hour of the time of her re-entering it. She had made good speed, and was within a short distance of her goal, but now she paused and hesitated. Her heart throbbed, not with hope or fear, but with a dull, aching pain, and her feet seemed rooted to the pavement. At the end of a short by-street, where huge cranes projected

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from the topmost stories of warehouses, she could see the river, black and sullen, with some lazy wreaths of fog creeping over its muddy waters. A few steps would bring her to the bank. A plunge, a gurgling cry unheard of men, and then the dark wavelets would be over her head, and all be over—the feverish unrest, the torturing dread, the bitter remorse, the baffled purpose—would it not be better, thus? She allowed herself to toy and dally with this thought, unwholesome food for the mind though it were, for some moments, and then shook her head and compressed her lips firmly together as she turned away.

“Such is the refuge of a love-sick grisette or of a duped factory girl,” she said, with her strange, stern smile; “I am of another mould, and can drink the cup of suffering, if need be, to the very dregs. Those are the weak who crave the coward’s self-inflicted death. No Conyers has been known to flinch as yet, nor will I be the first to desert my post.” And, as if the brief soliloquy had

braced her nerves, she instantly advanced towards the group of children disputing over their game on the slippery steps of the market, and asked which of the elvish company would guide her to the Rue Raccroc.

"I!" "I!" "I!" cried half a dozen eager voices at once, and there was a scramble and a fight, only terminated by Adeline's selection of the eldest of the brawlers—a wild-eyed girl of thirteen, whose ragged black hair hung like a horse's mane over her thin shoulders.

"Twenty sous, did you say, my good lady! I'll show you the way from here to St. Denis, if you like, for twenty sous, mam'zell! I know every lane, court, and alley, from here to the *barrière*, better than a priest knows his breviary," exclaimed the chosen one.

"You take care, mam'zell in the veil," called out a disappointed urchin whose toes peeped through his torn shoes; "take care where you go, with such a monkey as that *scélérate friponne* of a Léline to lead you!

Don't believe you have spinach in your eyes because she says so, and mind where she takes you, if you care to come out alive, for she has relations who, for the value of that shawl of yours, would——”

“Hold your tongue, wretched thief of a Joseph, or I'll come back to serve you up a soup that will stay your appetite for one while!” said the young girl, pulling off one of her iron-heeled shoes as she spoke, and casting back a look of savage menace that cut short the clamours of the mutinous. “Imp of Satan! that knows the taste of the prison bread so well, leave me tranquil to earn an honest halfpenny! Don't you mind his words, lady, for it is pure envy makes him speak, *foi de Lélène!* I've not had a meal now since Sunday, when two shop lads in their best clothes, seeing my hungry looks, and being in a good temper, gave me as much *galette* as I could eat, at a stall near the Gate of Mailly, and screamed with laughter as I snatched and swallowed the hot cake—the good for naughts! They had

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their soup, I'll be bound, and *bouilli*, and roast veal, and bread à *discretion* every day at the linen-draper's. But as for me, I get what I can. It isn't much, as you may guess!" And she drew her rags tightly round her, to show the skeleton form underneath, while her prominent cheek-bones and sallow skin confirmed the truth of her words.

"And your mother, my poor child?" asked Adeline, forgetting for a moment her own griefs and her own callous equanimity to the ills endured by others; "why does she not take better care of you than that?"

"Ah, *la mère*!" answered the girl, her lips twitching quickly. "See you, the poor mother has enough to do, and more, to feed herself. There's a little money yet—hush! I hope that *vaurien* Gibeloche did not hear me, as we passed the wine-shop—sewed up in her straw mattress, but *va*! she wants it for tisanes and doctor's stuff, let alone the good brandy that puts heart into a sick person better than all their drugs. She's a

palsied cripple, kind lady, and they've turned her out of the hospital as past cure; and because she never went to confession or mass, there's nothing for her from the Church poor-box, and, but for an old washerwoman, bless her! in the next house, she'd starve outright. Many's the can of soup the Mère Pichot puts aside for her. As for me, I pick up what I can, selling violets on the Pont Neuf, or doing whatever comes to hand. It's the cold I mind, more than the hunger. Let's hope the chandler's moon this month won't bring frost with it!"

There was something pathetic in this speech, that of a young barbarian whose share in the advantages derived from civilization was but a scanty one.

"Have you no father?" asked Adeline, as they plunged deeper into the labyrinth of darkling streets.

"He is dead;" answered the girl readily; and then, after an upward glance at her companion's face, dimly visible through the

veil, quickly added, "you seem kind, and yet I don't think you're a fool, so I won't lie to you. Father's not dead. He's à l'ombre."

"In the shade!" repeated Miss Conyers, who now heard this ambiguous idiom for the first time.

"Yes; yonder," said the child impatiently, jerking her lean thumb towards the south, "for ten years, the chain-gang and the dockyard, all for some rubbish of candlesticks that the miserly old merchant hadn't used twice a year since he bought them. Ah, well! The sun shines warm at Toulon, they say. I wish I were there, if this *chien* of a hard winter comes on as they tell us it will."

But although Léline might be the daughter of a galley-slave, and very probably was not over-scrupulous as to the means whereby she kept her meagre body and her darkened soul from absolutely parting company, she did nothing to justify the warning taunt of the tattered boy on

the steps of the market house. On the contrary, she conducted Miss Conyers with as much directness as was consistent with the tortuous nature of the thoroughfares to be traversed, to the Rue Raccroc, and to the door of the house indicated by the written card which Veuve Tracrenard had thrust into her hand. There she received, thankfully enough, the two-franc piece, doubling the promised payment, which Adeline tendered, and was in the act of retiring, when suddenly she exclaimed, "*Ah! sapristi! quel beau garçon!* And he seems to be watching us, too—*gredin* that he is!" But when Adeline turned her head and looked down the street in the direction towards which the child's finger pointed, the object of her guide's surprise had vanished, and nothing was to be seen save a few working men who now emerged from a café opposite, howling out the drunken chorus of some revolutionary ditty.

"No, no, he didn't wear a blouse, not he," answered Léline when questioned; "he

was well dressed, like an aristo, *va!* For all that, he seemed quite at home, and dived up the Cour aux Aveugles as if he had been born in the *quartier*. But Paris is great. Adieu, mam'zell!" And Léline was gone.

The house whither Miss Conyers had been led was, in appearance, somewhat more decent than the majority of those which she had passed in traversing the Rue Raccroc. The street itself was by no means of the most inviting. Black, narrow, and composed of hideous houses immeasurably high, it loomed like a ravine through the misty air of the city, an atmosphere as different from the bright, brisk air of the Champs Elysées as well might be within so small a compass. In the cold, cavernous entrance, Adeline looked in vain for the usual porter's lodge, whereat her inquiry might be made. A Paris house without a *concierge* of some sort she had never yet seen. There came, clanking over the broken stones of the vestibule, a man

who sucked at a black pipe, while his hands were thrust into the pockets of a rough pea-coat, and to him Miss Conyers addressed her question. The man, a broad-chested fellow of five-and-thirty, whose red shirt and dark beard added a certain picturesqueness to his aspect, broke into a horse laugh:

“Where can you come from, madame?” he said mockingly, “that you attribute such luxuries to us of the Rue Raccroc? As if we could afford to live in *maisons à portier*, and have our letters, and our hot water for shaving, carried up to our rooms by some, old Pipelet or other! I tell you, we are *sans façons*, who would soon wash the starch out of any one who was fool enough to set up a lodge amongst us. *Cordon, s’il vous plait!* Why, we’d hang him with it if he tried his tricks on us. Whom are you seeking, my dear? *Diable!* I haven’t made you cry, have I? *Peste!* I begin to believe that you are a real lady after all, and to be ashamed of myself.”

There was something good-natured in the man's reckless face ; and Adeline, with the quickness of her sex, snatched at the opportunity. "I should be so much obliged to you," she said gently, "if you would help me to find what I want. I am a stranger in Paris, and——"

"And a duchess, I can see that," struck in the man promptly. "Well, I've been a soldier and seen the world, and so much the better, for, let me tell you, you might have met worse wolves than me at this door, poor little Red Riding Hood that you are. There are gallows-birds skulking in the attics this minute that would take your life, if they could not get your watch and eardrops without it, and never know a minute's remorse over their brandy, until the gendarmes clutched them by the collar. I'm no robber, any way. Whom do you want?"

"Veuve Tracrenard," answered Adeline, steadily. "Do you know her?"

"Yes, she's new here, but not a bad

old gossip," replied the man in the red shirt. "She was neighbourly to me, six weeks since, when I came back with two broken ribs, after that row in the suburbs, and washed away the clotted blood from this," pointing to a half-healed scar on his cheek, "and gave me wine and tea. I'd never tasted tea. Come, she lives *au troisième*. I'll see you safe up the stairs, and stay and smoke my pipe and see you down again, if you'll promise to be quick—or, after all, the widow would do nearly as well. There are thieves in the house, but they won't meddle with her or with me. They know too well the value of a sound skin to trifle with one of my trade."

"And that is?" asked Adeline half mechanically, as she followed this singular conductor up the dust-strewn stairs.

"*La savate*, madame, at your service," returned the man proudly. "I am a professor of what you other English call the *boxe*, only it is the French *boxe*."

The house in which Adeline now found

herself was one of those dwellings that only the older portions of Paris can exhibit in the perfection of their gaunt ugliness. The very solidity with which it had been built only served to perpetuate the hideousness of dilapidations which never attained to the picturesqueness of utter ruin. The foul walls, glistening with mephitic exhalations, and scrawled over with ghastly caricatures inscribed with the charred end of a stick, were yet, save for the cracks in the plaster, stout enough to endure for years to come. The lofty staircase was dirty and broken, but it seemed as though a forest of timber had been employed in its construction. The atmosphere was heavy and tainted, despite the air that filtered in through shattered panes in the begrimed windows on each landing-place, and the whole building looked as though no effort had been made at repair or at embellishment for a couple of generations at the least. On each storey there were many doors, some of plain white deal,

others of a more massive make, painted black and clamped with iron, and others again that by the half-effaced inscriptions which they bore, and the roughness of the workmanship, had probably been put together by the tenant himself, the materials being the lids of old chests and packing-cases, rudely nailed together without regard to symmetry.

“Not a *maison de rentier*; not a millionaire’s palace, is it?” said the teacher of the science of self-defence. “It is not nice, I admit, though I could show you plenty more, compared with which this would seem superb. This brown door, to the left, is Widow Tracrenard’s. Now I think of it, I’ll go and finish my pipe at old Dubosc’s, *au second*. He’s an artist’s model, and has posed for half the Nephews and Jupiters in France. If anybody molests you coming down, you’ve nothing to do but to call ‘Bâton de houx’—that’s the nickname they give me, because of the tough holly twig I handle in a

match of singlesticks—and I'll not be long in answering to the roll. *Au plaisir!*" And with a half-grotesque, half-respectful salutation, the man swaggered away.

The first light knock at the widow's door brought out Veuve Tracrenard herself. She looked anxious and careworn, much more so than she had done in the morning. "He is worse," she said huskily, "worse than I thought. But he is longing to see you. Come in, and tread quietly, for he may have dropped asleep again. I was watching for you. Come in!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHISPERED WORDS.

VEUVE TRACRENARD, when Adeline had entered, heedfully secured the brown oaken door communicating with the landing-place, and led the way to a darkened chamber, where, at first, Adeline could distinguish nothing but the dim outlines of the furniture. The room was by no means bare. The floor was carpeted—an unusual luxury among the poorer Parisians—and there was a stove, in which burned, with a dull deep glow of sullen crimson, some clods of peat dug from the morasses of the Upper Marne, and sold cheaply on the quays of Paris. There was a large screen and a chest of drawers, a couch, a table covered

with phials, cups, plates, and books, and several chairs. On the walls hung a few prints and pictures, an old military sword, and, framed and glazed as if it had been a miniature, a sheet of parchment, covered with writing, and with a broad seal affixed to it; while to it was fastened, by means of pins, a faded riband, to which hung the enamelled cross of the Legion of Honour. It was not immediately that Miss Conyers was able to catalogue these objects, or to discern the bed, with its quilted counterpane of patchwork, beneath which there lay a human form, very still, and to all appearance asleep.

“Won’t she come, mother?” asked the weak, querulous voice of the occupant of the bed, stirring uneasily; and at the sound of those well-remembered accents, changed though they were from what they had once been, Adeline started, and pressed her hand to her heart, as if each word had been the stab of a dagger. “Will she not come to see me once, in the very little time that

remains, before I and daylight have done with one another?"

Veuve Tracrenard bent over the bed, and muttered something in a low tone.

"Here, do you say?" cried the sick man, tossing restlessly on his pillows. "I cannot see her. Let me have more light, for my eyes are very dim."

The widow drew back slowly, and as if reluctantly, the woollen curtain before the window, and allowed the grey light of the waning winter's day to struggle through the dirty glass of the panes. There ensued a silence more eloquent than words, as Adeline looked down upon the helpless figure, and on the haggard, ashen pale face, the ghastly hue of which seemed the more death-like for the blackness of the raven hair that straggled over the clean white linen of the pillow beneath it. There was no mistaking the warning, written in Death's own legible handwriting, on that pinched, wan face. The man was dying.

Of all wrecks, there are few or none more

pitiable than the miserable, broken wreck of a man who perishes untimely, by no accident, from no disease, but whose premature ending is due to the gradual sapping of the very citadel of life. This hopeless, doomed sufferer, lying prone on the bed whence he should be lifted to be laid in his coffin, had been in his day, as it was easy to see, a finely made man, and a handsome one withal, wasted and worn as his poor limbs and his meagre bust now were. He was tall, and might once have been agile and well proportioned. He was not young, but what the French call *jeune encore*—a year or two over forty, perhaps—and there was but a very little silver mixed with his long black hair, and no change of hue in the dark moustache that clothed his short upper lip. The teeth were very white and beautiful, and there must have been a charm about the smile that dwelt on that shapely mouth, so well moulded and expressive. The heavy eyelids almost hid the eyes now, and it was difficult

to imagine them as they had been, with their old flash and glitter ; but they had known in bygone days what it was to steal away a proud heart from its owner's jealous keeping. The long, thin hands, blanched and bloodless, lay feebly inert on the patchwork counterpane, or made a purposeless effort, now and again, to twitch the white sheet near them. A bad sign !

"Do you know me, Camille ?" asked Miss Conyers at last. To speak the first word cost her a desperate effort, but she made it, rather than stand longer silent, at the bedside of the dying man, who peered up at her, as one who strains his eyes in gazing into the darkness.

"Yes, *chère belle*, be sure he knows you," answered Veuve Tracrenard, rubbing her hands together in nervous pantomimic apology, while she narrowly, eagerly, watched every motion of the invalid.

"Yes, yes, Adeline," gasped out the poor wretch upon the bed. "I do know you. Years have gone over us both, but

you are very little altered. I have sometimes doubted if you had a heart. To see you, young and lovely and haughty, while I lie here, a crushed worm, makes me wonder whether you are not to be envied for being vulnerable nowhere but in your pride. Have you often thought of me?" he asked abruptly, in conclusion.

"Often. I could not forget, if I would," said Miss Conyers, with a sidelong glance at the widow. "I have been reminded of your existence and of your wants."

Camille's smile was sweet and gentle, like that of one almost lifted above earthly passions and weaknesses, as he made answer: "Forgive the poor mother if she grasped and sued and threatened, more for my sake than her own, to wring money out of what to her and to me appeared a mine of wealth richer than California can present—a great English fortune. I have been a base, scampish scoundrel. I know that well enough. But the bread that was bought with your gold was bitter to my

taste, and the wine left an after savour of blood; and I had no luck when I gambled with the cash that your fears, not your kindness, gave. You see me lie very low. Are you not wondering, as you gaze on me with those unpitying eyes, what was the glamour that lured you on?"

"I—I am not unpitying. I am sorry for your illness, and I hope for your—recovery!"

Miss Conyers stammered out these confused words, moved by the bond of conventional sympathy which we all feel when brought near to those who are on the threshold of the viewless world.

The sick man smiled again.

"The prayers of the saints," he said quietly, "could not keep the last few poor grains of sand from running fast away. Polite commonplace will avail me little; and indeed, on the brink of my dishonoured grave, I am past all complimentary forms of speech. I have done you much wrong, Adeline. Can you forgive me?"

He peered up at her with his weary,

restless eyes, as if trying to read the expression of her beautiful face.

"No, I see that you cannot," he said with a groan, after a moment's pause; nor did Miss Conyers contradict his words.

"I can be sorry for you," she said at length.

"Ah, but that is so different from forgiveness," moaned out the dying man, letting his heavy head sink back upon the pillow. "It is easier to pity than to pardon—not that I merit one or the other."

"I am looking as on the ghost of my own young life," exclaimed Adeline passionately. "You divined my thoughts but too accurately, just a minute since. I blame not you, but my own folly, my own infatuation, that made me take base metal for pure gold."

"Ay, but the metal was not all base then, *voyez vous!*" replied the invalid, with unwonted energy, as he raised himself on one elbow, and opened his dark eyes for the first time to their fullest width. "You

believed in me, Adeline, because I was partly worth believing in. I was not quite lost then. There was something left in me of my brave old father, who won his cross and his epaulettes on the battle-field. I blush still, when I look at yonder old sword, at yonder decoration, to think that the Major Tracrenard would have disowned his son had he lived till now. But when first we met, I was not quite a villain. I was not wholly bad, and might have done better if—but what signify possibilities that were never to be realized. You were not the only one, too, to detect some sparkles of genius about the careless, good-for-nothing artist. Wise and kind men gave me well-meant counsel, deeming that I was capable of better and brighter things; that I—I, Camille Tracrenard, whose dinner depended on his retouching the sorry drawings of his young lady pupils—who had to bow and smirk and trade on the weaknesses of his employers—might rise to be a credit to French art.”

Then came a long pause, only broken by the low moans and difficult breathing of the sick man. Veuve Tracrenard, biting her lips, crooking her fingers, contrived somehow to keep silent. Rarely in her long life had she proved capable of such reticence. For to talk is in an elderly Frenchwoman as ingrained an instinct as that which prompts a bird to sing; and it said much for her maternal affection and her son's influence that she was able to remain mute for so long.

“Your talents,” said Adeline, breaking the silence at last, “were brilliant enough, I believe, to deserve recognition. But you have not called me here, I conclude, to talk to me on such a subject as that. I gathered from what your mother told me, that you had something to communicate.”

“So he has, *chère mignonne*; so he has,” interposed the widow; “but I am his poor mother, and am bound to be careful of my boy's interests. And what he has to say may send you, for anything I know, out of

the room and of the house, as if the plague were here in this wretched place, whither, indeed, we never should have removed, had not my son's misfortunes compelled it. He has had losses—yes! yes! not at play merely, but in speculations and trouble, and *démêlés avec La Justice*, since his duel; and has been persecuted by his creditors, the wretches, and so we have come here—here, where if a bailiff or a *huissier* dared to show his harpy face, I could have the skin flayed off him by merely lifting a finger. Now dear Camille is very, very ill, and many comforts are needed,* and you, dear lady, of a family so rich and great——”

“Hush! mother, hush! for shame's sake,” broke in the invalid hoarsely. “The truth I have to tell, no welcome one, is to be given, not sold. Better the hospital than food or medicine paid for by her. Have we not squeezed the sponge long and hard enough?” he added, with a hollow, ghostly laugh. “It is when a man lies here, as I lie, that he sees in the true light what it was

to *exploiter* a woman's love, a woman's trust, a woman's fears, as I have done in the heyday of my strength. Do you care, Adeline, to hear the truth—and can you hear it and not curse me?”

Miss Conyers, trembling now as for years she had not trembled, bent over the bed. “Tell me anything,” she said in a voice that faltered perceptibly, “so that it be true. But deal fairly with me at the last.”

“I will,” answered the dying man, gasping for breath. “I—I——”

With a cry of real alarm, his mother hurried to prop up his sinking head, and to pour some drops of cordial between the livid lips. It was not for some little time that the fainting sufferer could muster strength enough to say: “I find I must be brief, lest breath fail before all is told. Stoop down, Adeline—lower yet. I cannot, even I, bring myself to say aloud what it behoves me to tell.”

Miss Conyers bent her stately head until her fair hair brushed the cold forehead of

the dying man, and approached her ear to his lips. Then after a pause, he spoke in a whisper, and slowly, with a terrible distinctness, until at length the low murmur of his smothered voice ceased, and then she raised her head, pressed her gloved hands upon her throbbing temples, and with a long-drawn sob, reeled back and caught eagerly at the back of a chair, to which she clung, as for support.

"I thought I had tasted of the full bitterness before," she said in English, "but this is worse—worse. I am indeed humbled now."

The poor, frail, broken "wretch" on the bed lay gasping and motionless, his heavy eyelids half closed, evidently exhausted. Adeline had sunk into a chair, and with her eyes fixed on the ground, seemed half stupefied, as if what she had heard had benumbed her brain. Veuve Tracrenard, uneasy, perplexed, looked from one to the other.

"It is true!" said Miss Conyers at last in a high shrill tone, as she sprang from her

seat and approached the bed; "it is true, then? The fiend, your master, has not suggested to you to lie to me, merely that I might be the sport of greed or malice? And, if so, where are the proofs?"

"Give her the papers, mother," said the invalid feebly, as he glanced towards a large envelope, carefully sealed, that lay on the table. Adeline snatched it up, and for the moment, such was the menace expressed by her flaming eyes and the panther-like contraction of her well-shaped mouth, that Veuve Tracrenard, alarmed, threw herself in the way.

"You shall not harm him. I'll rouse the house, and soon bring help here if you lay a finger on Camille," she said stoutly. "Lay the blame on me, if you will."

"You—you knew of this, then?" asked Adeline, in a voice that sounded like the hiss of a snake.

"Yes, knew of it, but did not counsel it, *foi de Joséphine*," replied the old woman, with all the energy of truth. "If my

advice had been taken—but enough of that. I meant you no harm in the first instance, not I; nay, I rather liked you, until your infernal pride of race and birth made me hate you, the rather that it blighted the hopes I'd formed for my poor boy. He would not have been at war with society if you had been of a different stamp, if you had been willing to give up—*mon Dieu*, he is dead!" she exclaimed, breaking off to hurry to the assistance of the helpless sufferer, whose ghastly face and the awful passiveness of whose attitude did indeed suggest death itself. It was but a swoon, brought on, no doubt, by the violent excitement of this agitating interview; but when Madame Tracrenard had leisure again to look round, she saw that Adeline's place was vacant. She had quitted the room unobserved, had descended the stairs, reeling like one who has received a sudden blow, and almost groped her way into the street without. The short winter's day was nearly spent, and the shadows were

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CURÉ.

THERE is in a suburb of Paris a little old church, built of red brick faced with stone, and which is known to a limited number of local worshippers by the designation of Saint Minime les Ternes. Who Saint Minime was, or why, in the suburb where once the Roman baths extended their spacious porticos, a fane had been erected in honour of so small and obscure a saint, was probably a secret to all except some parochial antiquary. Saint Minime has no altar-piece, the work of a great master; no pulpit carved by cunning artists of the sixteenth century; no reredos loaded with mediæval fruit and flowers; no marvellous tapestry or ancient lace, or pyx and

chalice and paten, the work of Florentine silversmiths, to attract sight-seers: and is consequently as completely ignored by the compilers of guide-books, and neglected by travellers, as any similar chapel in the outskirts of a great city. Nobody, save the *marguilliers*, who represent the intense respectability of our English churchwardens, and a handful of pious old dames, whose lives had been spent under the shadows of its crocketed spires, cared very much for Saint Minime.

The sacristan of the little church himself, elderly, small boned, and scant of breath, with a withered face that bore an odd resemblance to a Norfolk biffen in its most highly dried condition, was shuffling to and fro in his straw slippers, and rattling his bunch of heavy keys as he slowly went through the round of his monotonous duties. The dust had been swept away from floor and stair, from vestry and organ-loft. The tarnished pipes of the organ itself, the altar-rails, and the brass grating that protected

the side chapel of Our Lady of the Ternes, had been rubbed till they were almost bright again. Three or four votive tapers, paid for by grateful convalescents, burned before one or two of the tiny shrines that dotted the nave. The harsh, feeble bell had been rung with due precision at the proper hours, and even then there were two poor women on their knees on the matted pavement, with their faces turned towards the draped high altar, where Saint Minime's picture looked down upon the tall, gilded crucifix, the tinsel, the artificial flowers, and the candles unlighted.

"Is old M. Hénin, who was curé here, still alive, and still priest of this parish?" asked a voice, so suddenly and so unexpectedly, that the sacristan, who was slightly deaf, started as he heard it. A lady, closely veiled, had approached him without his being aware of it, and now she reiterated her question, and more distinctly than before.

"Ay, ay, mademoiselle, or madame,

whichever you may be, M. le curé is with us yet, but he's getting to be old ; seventy-nine last March his housekeeper told me, and he has had this cure for thirty-seven years come Martinmas. It's the vicar, the R. P. Richard, who does most of the work, but our excellent Monsieur Hénin is the best liked by the parishioners of the old sort ; and there are many who prefer to confess to him, to detailing their sins to the R. P. Richard, though I don't deny that he preaches stirring sermons—those Passionists always do. Well, as I was saying, it's about the hour when you are sure to find M. le curé in his confessional ; not that many penitents are likely to drop in this bitter January day. But surely, mademoiselle, or madame, you don't belong to Saint Minime ? English, if I'm not mistaken ? ”

“ I do not live within the parish, certainly,” returned the stranger, who was no other than Adeline. “ I have been here, however, years ago, and perhaps M. le curé

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“ I do not live within the parish, certainly,” returned the stranger, who was no other than Adeline. “ I have been here, however, years ago, and perhaps M. le curé

Hénin might remember me. It is my wish to-day, for reasons of my own, to recall myself to his recollection. It seems that I have been fortunate in chancing on a time when I am likely to find him at his post. I will sit down yonder, by the pillar, and wait. Perhaps you will be good enough to let me know when the priest is here, and disengaged. I will not detain him long." And as she spoke she placed in the sacristan's ready palm something that chinked with a pleasant argentine sound, and received the old man's best bow in return.

"English—and want to see our curé," he muttered to himself as he went about his work. "Since those two tall sisters, the Irlandaises, whose name I never could pronounce, but which began with an O, went away from their lodgings in the Rue Davoust, we've had no insularies among us here in Saint Minime. Never mind. The lady is a real lady, *bien gentille*, and I'll do her errand when our Monsieur drops in."

It was not, as the custodian of the little place of worship had truly said, a very inviting morning. The high keen wind was piercingly cold, and the sky had a hard stony look, as if it had been carved out of grey granite. The sharp-cutting white dust that fell from a hundred scaffolds where masons were toiling to adjust huge blocks of stone in their courses, defied Baron Haussmann's water-carts to allay its pitiless pelting. There was ice in the basins of the ornamental fountains in the long avenues of the stately Champs Elysées, ice on lake and pond of the yet more stately Bois de Boulogne, ice on the canals where the useless barges were wedged in. The Chandler's moon was setting in after a fashion worthy of its reputation, and many an eye was cast towards the windward horizon to catch the first glimpse of the long-expected snow. It is not wonderful, then, that the attendance of the faithful at the early mass had been but scanty, or that when the incumbent of Saint Minime's

reached the church, he should have found it all but empty. A mild little ecclesiastic, and a kindly one withal, unless his looks belied him, was the old priest, with his silver hair and his silver-rimmed spectacles, his neat shoes, and a wadded coat outside of his trim *soutane*, a shovel hat of moderate brim overshadowing his bleached face. A poor preacher very likely, and despised by the brethren of the half-score of Jesuit fraternities, that under various names make up the fighting force of the French Church militant, but still loved by the needy and sorrow-stricken. He was the meekest of men, M. le curé, and his estimate of his own merits was lowly enough to satisfy his coadjutor and probable successor, the vicar. It never would have entered into the head of unobtrusive M. Hénin that he was in his sphere a bulwark to the Vatican. And yet such was the case. It is the child-like faith, the patient virtue, of such as he, that make Rome possible.

“ You can come in, if you please, young

gentleman, the house of prayer is free to all," said the curé smiling, as he encountered in the outer porch a handsome boy who seemed to loiter near the church as if hesitating to enter. "We have not much to tempt a traveller's curiosity," he added, good-naturedly holding open the swinging inner door of dark wood, "but there is some rare stained glass in the east window. It is the only choice thing the fabric can boast of, for we are not famous or rich, and we were damaged in the troubled days of '93. You are a foreigner, sir, German or English, perhaps Russian? Ah, well! at any rate it is warmer inside than in the cold January wind."

The young stranger availed himself of the priest's politeness sufficiently to enter the edifice, but he appeared when once inside to prefer a distant view of the painted glass of the east window referred to, rather than approach it more closely. Yet he seemed to be in no hurry to quit the little church which at first sight appeared very unlikely

to prove interesting to one of his years and bearing. As it was he seemed to find an inexhaustible store of noticeable objects in the immediate vicinity of the side door through which he had entered. The padlocked poor-box, that other box of brown oak with the slit for the reception of eleemosynary copper coin destined, as the label showed, to alleviate the purgatorial pains of the departed, the stone font topped by a tonsured head presumed to represent that which Saint Minime wore when in the flesh, and the squat pillars of porous stone, had never before been deemed deserving of so pertinacious inspection as they now received. But the boy, in whom it would have been easy for an acquaintance to recognize Darrell Conyers, avoided crossing any of the open spaces in the church.

"Certainly, certainly, Ambrose; I will speak with the foreign lady since she wishes it, as soon as Madame Dubois is gone," said the priest, in answer to a communication from the sacristan; and though the

words were quiet and commonplace, the curé's slow pulse quickened its beating at the idea of such an innovation. Let us hope that the confession of Madame Dubois, who was the wife of a pork butcher, and in some sort responsible for the quality of the meat whereof her husband's strings of marbled sausages were composed—did not suffer from any preoccupation on the part of her spiritual guide. But strangers, foreigners, and English, were not very much in harmony with M. Hénin's daily life, and it was to him quite a piece of mild excitement to be sought out by a lady who united all these qualifications. Had she doubts—scruples of conscience—such as sometimes led to a change of religion? If so, every stray sheep was to be welcomed to the fold of which M. Hénin was a pastor. Yes, yes; but then she might want to argue, to have light thrown on dark subjects, and that would never do for M. le curé, at his age, and with his tone of thought. He was no casuist, and had

allowed the few polemical weapons he had brought with him, long ago from the training college, to grow very rusty. The vicar, however, M. Richard, could talk to her if need were, and he at any rate had kept his controversial harness bright and ready. Or, could this be some rich and pious person, perhaps from America, India, New Holland, *enfin*, the colonies, who desired to do a good work, and would possibly regild the high altar, retouch the colours of those poor faded old pictures, or even enable the west window, smashed by the Jacobin rabble in the revolution of 1793, to vie with the painted glories of the window to the east?

The interview between the veiled lady and the aged priest lasted for some minutes, and as it proceeded M. le curé forgot his apprehensions of the imaginary convert who might insist on his rubbing up his waning recollections of Augustinian homilies and Tridentine decrees; forgot, too, the disappointment of his short-lived hopes that

some wealthy benefactress was about to beautify the little church which he loved as the apple of his eye. Seldom had the gentle old man been more moved by the stories to which he had hearkened in that confessional than he now was by the recital which, in low clear accents, was now made to him.

"It is an infamy," he said, more than once, in a thin shrill voice that quivered with honest indignation; "an infamy, I say! My daughter, you have, indeed, suffered a grievous wrong; one for which I fear very much there can be no remedy here on earth. Allow me, I beg, to see those papers again. Ah, yes, I perceive that I must have been duped, miserably duped, and Saint Minime's—it is too atrocious!"

By far the calmer of the two was the lady to whom the priest continued at intervals to address words of pity and condolence. Indeed the nerves of Adeline Conyers were by nature and by habit much stronger than those of the curé of the little

suburban church. It was not for such comfort as kind words can impart that she had sought the old man out. She continued to urge question upon question, pressing her point with all the energy that a personal interest can impart; but the curé of Saint Minime's, though not sparing of his sympathy, was clearly firm in his conviction that whatsoever of injustice had been wrought could not be righted by any available human agency. "His Holiness himself could scarcely give help in such a matter," said the priest, in sore perturbation of spirit. "It is a point on which the Church has ever been tender and pitiful, but we are in France, and there is a concordat, *voyez vous !* which limits the authority of the Holy See. I am shocked and sorry, very sorry, but I feel no doubt of my own powerlessness to advise or to assist, save by the prayers of an old man, and the blessing which can, at any rate, do you no harm."

The sacristan, as he saw the veiled

English lady retire from the confessional with slow step, and gloved hands tightly clasped together, and her proud head bent as though beneath a crushing weight of shame or grief, and watched the old curé depart in an unwonted state of tremulous agitation, bethought him that he had before his eyes one of those dramas of real human suffering and sin, deep and pathetic as a Greek tragedy, that are sometimes, though seldom, revealed within the portals of a church, French, Spanish, Italian, as the case may be. The penitents who frequented Saint Minime were but humdrum sinners with petty faults to be shrived from, and probably, like the slippery insolvents with whom courts of bankruptcy have to deal, somewhat loose and forgetful in the schedules of their every-day offences.

"It's too much for our monsieur, that sort of thing," said the sacristan, his conscience pricking him a little as to Adeline's silver now nestling in his pocket, and his own zeal in abetting her interview with

the curé, 'too much for him. If I'd known she had been anything of that sort"—and his imagination flew off to the assize court, the prison, manacled wrists, and the torchlight assembly an hour before dawn upon the Place de la Roquette, that represents the ancient Place de la Grève, around the guarded scaffold—"I'd have got rid of her civilly, or else bidden her wait to see the R. P. Richard. She'd not have shaken the Passionist much, whatever she might have to tell. But poor dear M. Hénin! I shouldn't wonder if the *pauvre vieux* had a seizure of some sort after this: and who knows if the R. P. Richard wouldn't want to bring in some Jesuit lay brother to carry my keys as sacristan! However, there's one comfort, the *marquilliers* know me; and the bishop's chaplain always says, '*comment cela va, Bobinet?*' quite pleasantly."

But the sacristan, while busy with his thoughts, which turned, always with reference to his own little selfish stake in

the matter, on the immemorial struggle between the secular and the regular clergy, quite forgot to notice one element in the mysterious scene which had been enacted before his eyes. He had scarcely noticed the English-looking boy who seemed to have strayed into the church, and who had remained there a witness, so far as distance and a screen of solid oak would permit, of the colloquy between Miss Conyers and the priest. And yet the sight of the stripling lurking among the pillars and keeping vigilant but stealthy watch, did appear to complete the dramatic force of the situation. Darrell's gay, good-humoured carelessness, his airy, sunny mirth, seemed for the time being to have deserted him. He looked keen and thoughtful as he bent forward his golden curls, and fixed his falcon eyes upon the spot where his kindred enemy was in conversation with the old priest. So might the young Orestes have stooped his haughty head frowningly, as he played the spy among the shadowy halls of his

father's Argive palace—Hamlet's prototype, ever brooding on the unavenged murder of royal Agamemnon—before his unwilling hand was reddened with the gore that all Lethe could not wash away.

But Adeline Conyers, absorbed in her own dark thoughts, remained unaware of the boy's presence, and made the best of her way to the outer air. The biting north wind, the nipping cold, the driving dust, the contact with the tameless powers of nature, seemed to invigorate her flagging spirits. She raised her head and threw up her veil to allow the frosty air to play upon her burning cheek and brow. The sense of reality, of life, of motion, which we have all felt when shaking off the unwholesome lethargy of sad reverie to plunge into the brisk, working world outside, did her good. She was some one yet, a sharer in the vast heritage of our first parents, and not merely a sad memory. So she walked quickly forward, and soon reached the long, broad Avenue de Ternes, which

led towards Paris. There, however, a surprise awaited her. Hard by the place where she had ordered the coachman of the *fiacre* that had brought her thither to await her return, another hackney carriage had halted beside the kerbstone, and from it, as she came in sight, emerged the well-known figure of Madame Tracrenard.

Veuve Tracrenard was clad in deep mourning; her reddened eyes, her careworn face, told of vigils and of weeping, but still she seemed alert and resolute.

"You read, before I speak, what I have to tell," she said curtly as she approached. "He whom you—hated, is beyond the reach of earthly love or hate. I have closed his eyes. I have seen him in his coffin. When he was laid in his grave, it was but yesterday, I was the only mourner—the poor bunch of flowers I dropped into the trench, ere they filled in the earth again, the only tribute to the dead. He looked so peaceful, Adeline, as he lay on the bed in that last sleep that knows no waking, that I

wished—God forgive me!—that I, too, could die and be at rest. All the old stains of sin and suffering were gone, and he lay there as when I watched my pretty boy, long years ago, asleep in his cradle. Oh, my son, my son! My baby that I lulled to rest when these old arms were young—my bold, handsome boy, my fine high-spirited young man that I hoped would live to hang a wreath of yellow immortelles, once a year, on his old mother's headstone, instead of dying before my eyes in poverty and disgrace—*ah! ciel!* I am very wretched!" And Madame Tracrenard burst into a passion of tears, so genuine, fierce, and uncontrollable, that Adeline, who had no cause to love her, was hushed and impressed, despite herself, by the mother's heartfelt cry of despairing anguish.

"He—he died without pain?" faltered out Miss Conyers, after a pause; but the question was unheard or unheeded, neither did she repeat it. Presently it became perceptible that Veuve Tracrenard's sudden

outbreak of wild grief was passing away, like those hurricanes that strew the shores of the Antilles with wreck and ruin, and then leave blue skies and balmy air behind them; and that the worst side of the woman's grasping, greedy nature was about to resume its old supremacy. She wiped away her tears, and fixed her eyes, which were quite hard, now, on Adeline. "*Ad nous deux, maintenant!*" she said spitefully. "We have an account to settle together, you and I, *belle demoiselle!*"

"Have we? I owe you, indeed, the recollection of a long course of deceit, extortion, and impertinent importunity," said Miss Conyers coolly, "but these are claims that you would hardly urge. Is it money that you ask?" Her lip curled as she spoke.

Madame Tracrenard, unabashed, began her glib speech. Yes; she did want money, or, if more convenient, money's worth, such as jewels. Camille's illness, Camille's

funeral, had entailed grievous expenses. Veuve Tracrenard's pecuniary position was of the most painful. Mademoiselle Conyers must, *for her own sake*—the words were uttered with a malicious emphasis—continue to befriend her.

Adeline turned to bay, like a stag hard pressed by the hounds. "Hark you, Veuve Tracrenard!" she said. "I have waited your conclusion to ascertain to what a depth of baseness a covetous soul like yours could descend. You think to trade, then, on my fears? Undeceive yourself. Not your son's death, but the words that your son whispered in my shrinking ear, with his dying breath almost, have shattered the magic wand with which you, vile witch that you are, have so long ruled me—me—a Conyers. Were it to save you from jail or gibbet, not another liard shall pass from my hand to yours; hear you that, you old *sorcière*? You threaten below your breath, do you? Test your power. Go to my aunt,

to Sir Peregrine! Tell all you know. I promise you that, instead of receiving hush-money for your revelations, before the day is out the Procureur Impérial shall be sifting your evidence, lie by lie, sham by sham, until Justice finds out how much of punishment be the due of Camille's mother, for her share in Camille's fraud. Now do your worst!"

Madame Veuve Tracrenard slunk away, cowed, speechless, confuted, for the moment. It was as much the aristocratic haughtiness, the angry arrogance, of Adeline's new manner, that had served to silence her, as anything which Adeline had said. It was not till both *fiacres* had disappeared in the direction of Paris, that Darrell, who from a gateway at some distance had been an eye-witness of this stormy interview, and who had perfectly recognized the woman whom he had first seen on the footbridge over the Kightle, and again in the Rue de Babylone, emerged from his lair, and

beckoning to a ragged lad who held his horse by the bridle at the mouth of a narrow by-lane, mounted and rode slowly off homewards.

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